ALEXANDER'S INTELLIGENCE SYSTEM

It has frequently been recognized that the collection and use of accurate military intelligence was of fundamental importance for the success of Alexander's campaigns.[1] No intelligent strategic or tactical decision can be made by any commander without advance knowledge of an enemy's location, strength, his capabilities and weaknesses, and the geography of the projected campaign.[2] However, an analysis of the procedures Alexander used to obtain and evaluate intelligence has never been undertaken. This neglect is probably the result of the scattered and unsatisfactory nature of the references to Alexander's intelligence procedures in our ancient sources. For example, they are silent about the institutional organization and administrative procedures which were undoubtedly necessary for the system's effective functioning.[3] Furthermore, the sources never mention the transmission of intelligence data to anyone else except the king and thus it is difficult to determine the role other individuals may have had in the intelligence organization.[4] Nevertheless, in all our sources, the references we do possess show coherent patterns of intelligence procedures being used which are consistent with the general principles of military intelligence long in use. Because of the limitations of our sources, only a sketch of these procedures can be attempted here, but it is hoped that this may provide a beginning for further research on this important problem. This analysis will attempt to discover the procedures Alexander used to obtain and evaluate strategic and tactical intelligence, and how the procedures changed under different circumstances. Next, the counter-intelligence procedures Alexander used will be examined and finally intelligence failures: where did they occur and what were their causes?

I

Properly speaking, military intelligence can be divided into two broad categories: strategic and tactical. Often, the differences between them are vague and both are frequently collected simultaneously, often from the same sources.[5] Strategic intelligence concerns the knowledge needed to plan and achieve over-all military

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[1] Peter Green, *Alexander of Macedon* (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 405; Eugene N. Borza, 'Alexander's Communications', *Ancient Macedonia* 2 (1977), pp. 295–303. The following abbreviations will be used in this paper: A.—Arrian, *Anabasis*; C.— Quintus Curtius, *History of Alexander the Great*; D.—Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*; J.—Justin, *Epitome*; P.—Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*.

[2] Irving Hegmont, *Combat Intelligence in Modern Warfare* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1960), pp. 2–9; Robert R. Glass and Philip B. Davidson, *Intelligence is for Commanders* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1952), pp. 84 f.; Victor Séverin Sobieski de Janina,

Théorie générale des reconnaissances militaires (Paris, 1851), pp. 281–92; Chester G. Starr, *Political Intelligence in Classical Greece, Mnem.* Suppl. 31 (Leiden, 1974), pp. 30 f. Hegmont notes that while the methods of collecting intelligence have changed greatly in recent years, the general principles directing its collection have remained the same for millennia.

[3] Cf. Borza, op. cit., p. 296.

[4] Of course, intelligence was transmitted to subordinates when they were sent on their own missions, C. 3.13.1–4.

[5] Tactical and strategic intelligence collected simultaneously: C. 9.2.2–7; cf. Hegmont, op. cit., pp. 2–6.

objectives. For example, to plan the type of logistic support that may be needed to conduct a campaign, intelligence must first be collected about the over-all climate, geography, and agricultural resources of the opponent's country. The general availability of transport facilities, pack animals, and arms-manufactories for the acquisition of replacement arms should also be known. Other factors which were useful to know for planning a campaign and especially for governing an opponent's country after its conquest include his military organization, financial resources, customs, psychology, ethnic groups and their attitudes towards the central government, his political system, and prior history.[6]

A great deal of strategic information on the Persian Empire and especially its western satrapies was available to the Greek world long before Philip and Alexander planned their Asian expedition. One may cite for example, the numerous literary works concerning the Persians by Herodotus, Ctesias, and Xenophon, some of which may have been read and used by Alexander.[7] Apart from literary sources, strategic information might also have been obtained from merchants, travellers, artisans, and Macedonian and Greek diplomats to the Persian royal court and satrapal courts.[8] Other important sources of strategic information about the Persians were undoubtedly the Greeks who fought with Agesilaus in Anatolia and later the Athenian and Theban soldiers who aided the revolt of Artabazus against Artaxerxes Ochus. Also, the Greeks who fought with Ochus against the Egyptians and those Greeks enrolled in Egyptian service could supply much information about the combat effectiveness of the Persian army.[9] Moreover, high-ranking exiles from the Persian Empire to Philip's court during the reign of Ochus, such as Artabazus, Sisines, Menapis, and Memnon of Rhodes could have been especially important sources of strategic information.[10] All these men held satrapies or high military commands

[6] C. 9.2.2-7; A. 5.25.1; A. 4.1.2; A. 3.7.3; D. 17.93.2; cf. Sobieski de Janina, (above, n. 2), pp. 278-92; Hegmont (above, n. 2), pp. 2-6; Glass and Davidson (above, n. 2), pp. 84 f.; Starr (above, n. 2), pp. 30 f. The details of Alexander's intelligence system given by Arrian, Curtius, Diodorus, Plutarch, and Strabo form a coherent pattern, consistent with general principles of intelligence collection. On the whole, their descriptions are complementary and not contradictory. The only exception is the apologetic Arrian's failure to mention the activities of Alexander's agents within his own camp (although they are mentioned by another apologetic source, Plutarch, as well as by Curtius). See below, n. 60.

[7] Xenophon's Cyropaedia, Anabasis, and Hellenica would be of value as would Ctesias' now lost work On the Tribute Throughout Asia, Persica, and Tour of the World (FGrHist. 688, F 53, F 1, F 55-9). Other works on the Persians which would be available to Philip and Alexander were by Dionysius of Miletus (FGrHist. 687); Hellanikos of Lesbos (FGrHist. 687a); Charon of Lampsakos (FGrHist. 687b);

Herakleides of Cyme (FGrHist. 689); Deinon of Colophon (FGrHist. 690); Skylax of Caryanda, Periplus (FGrHist. 709, F. 3-7); and Ephorus of Cyme (FGr Hist. 70). Alexander was probably well acquainted with Xenophon's march to Cunaxa (A. 2.7.8-9) and his route of march in Cilicia was the same as that followed by Xenophon, D. Engels, Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army (Berkeley and London, 1978), pp. 49 f.

[8] Athenian agents in Persia: Demosthenes, On the Navy Boards, 27. Athenian and Macedonian envoys to Persia: Aeschines, Ctes. 238; A. 2.14.2. These individuals and others as well undoubtedly obtained a great deal of strategic intelligence on the Persian Empire which enabled contemporaries such as Isocrates (Philip 101-4) to be well acquainted with Persian political affairs. Cf. Starr (above, n. 2), pp. 22 f.; Wolfgang Riepl. Das Nachrichtenwesen des Altertums (Leipzig, 1913), p. 464.

[9] For the events of the period see, D. 16. 22.1-6; 52; A. T. Olmstead, History of the Persian Empire (Chicago, 1970), pp. 417-32.

[10] Artabazus, Memnon, and Menapis

and would be in a position to have vital strategic information about the entire Persian Empire. Their information was probably accurate since they would scarcely feel compelled either to protect a regime that had exiled them or to withold intelligence from those who had given them support. Finally, additional information could have been obtained from Persian diplomatic missions to Philip's court. The story of seven-year old Alexander questioning Persian envoys about the length of the roads and the nature of the journey into the interior of their country may be apocryphal (although there seems little reason to doubt it, given who his father was and the type of environment in which he was brought up), but it does indicate precisely the types of questions the Macedonian court undoubtedly asked of various Persian sources.[11] It is not impossible—although there is no evidence—that some strategic intelligence was recorded in written form, perhaps supplemented by maps.

Strategic information obtained prior to Alexander's invasion of Asia was supplemented and expanded throughout his campaigns. Diplomatic envoys used as spies and sent to countries where future campaigns might be undertaken were one method Alexander used to obtain strategic intelligence.[12] Another method was the interrogation of high-ranking officials of one nation to obtain strategic intelligence about neighbouring nations Alexander planned to conquer.[13] Generally, strategic intelligence would not be as important for countries which surrendered to Alexander before he entered their territory, since in these cases, there would be no enemy armies to fight, or strongholds to capture, and arrangements were usually made by local officials to supply the army and guide its march before it entered their territory.[14] Additionally, considerable strategic information was undoubtedly obtained through the same sources and procedures as tactical intelligence throughout Asia.

II

Specifically, tactical intelligence concerns the knowledge a commander must obtain to accomplish successfully individual missions which are necessary to achieve over-all strategic objectives.[15] These missions may be no more than a march from one city or region to the next, or they may involve the besieging of a city, or the destruction of a large army or fleet. It is clear even from the scattered evidence in our sources that no important tactical decision was made

were exiled in 352 BC and Sisines was sent to Philip's court by the satrap of Egypt, D. 16.52.3; C. 6.5.1-2; C. 3.7.11; Green (above, n. 1), p. 37. It is significant that Philip seems to have formulated his plans for the conquest of Persia about the same time these exiles were in his court (J. R. Ellis, *Philip II and Macedonian Imperialism* (London, 1976), pp. 227 f.) and undoubtedly much of the planning was based on intelligence supplied by these individuals.

[11] P. 5.1; Plut. *de Fort. aut Virt. Alex.* 342C; Polyb. 12.22.5. Information becomes

intelligence after it has been evaluated for its reliability, accuracy, and usefulness.

[12] A. 4.1.2. Perhaps heralds were used in this way also.

[13] D. 17.93.2, A. 5.25.1, A. 6.1.5, A. 6.4.5, C. 8.12.12-13, C. 9.2.2-7, Str. 2.1. 6, cf. A. 3.7.3.

[14] Engels (above, n. 7), p. 41.

[15] Hegmont (above, n. 2), pp. 2-6. For example, the conquest of the Mediterranean coastline to deprive the Persian fleet of a base of operations was a strategic objective, while the siege of Tyre was one of the tactical operations undertaken to accomplish this objective.

by Alexander without advance intelligence. Often, when there is no direct
evidence for intelligence procedures in operation, they may be deduced from
actual events themselves. For example, no sizable army, ancient or modern, could
cross the Sinai Desert without thorough, advance logistical planning and
preparation.[16] Since the Macedonian army, carrying its own supplies on the
backs of its soldiers, servants, and pack-animals could not remain self-sufficient
in food and water for more than four days, even at half rations, and the army
took seven days to cross, clearly advance logistic planning and preparation were
necessary for the crossing to have been successful, even though none are men-
tioned by our sources.[17] Moreover, for the planning to have been effective, a
thorough knowledge of the route, its resources (or lack thereof in this instance),
anchorages along the coast, distances, and marching conditions must have been
first obtained through intelligence.

   Indeed, tactical operations were often affected by the logistic capabilities of
the Macedonian army which were severely limited where no sea- or river-transport
facilities were accessible. This is because the army could only remain self-sufficient
in food for about ten days and if water and fodder needed to be carried in addi-
tion to food, the army could only remain self-sufficient for about four days at
half rations.[18]

   In addition to the limited capabilities of ancient overland transportation,
Alexander and his staff also had to contend with the subsistence level of most
agricultural production in the lands through which the army marched. With the
exception of the Nile Valley, Southern Mesopotamia, Sistan, and the Indus
Valley, the primitive methods of agriculture scarcely afforded much surplus at
all, and during the months before harvest, populations engaged in subsistence
agriculture frequently do not possess adequate food to feed themselves and
therefore could not supply the needs of an entire army, even if compelled to do
so. All these problems were compounded by the aridity and barrenness of much
of the terrain of the Near East through which the Macedonians marched. Because
of the limitations of overland transport, the Macedonians could only effectively
collect supplies within a 60 to 80 mile radius or a four-day journey from a
stationary camp, and when it was moving, the radius was reduced to less than
15 to 17 miles.[19] When it is remembered that much of the land within these
radii was often barren wasteland or fallow-land, the difficulties of logistic
planning faced by the Macedonians can readily be appreciated.

   For these reasons, it was essential for Alexander to obtain precise intelligence

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[16] Cf. the armies of Cambyses (Hdt.
3.5-8); Artaxerxes (D. 16.46.5); Antigonus
(D. 20.73-4); and Bonaparte (J. Christopher
Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt* (New York,
1962), pp. 267 f.). There is virtually no
cultivable land or vegetation along the
coastal route and the few meagre wells
would be dry in early autumn when the
Macedonians crossed. See D. G. Hogarth,
'The Geography of the War Theatre in the
Near East', *Geo. Journ.* 45 (1915), 464;
P. G. Elgood, *Egypt and the Army* (London,
1924), p. 267; G. W. Murray, 'The Land of
Sinai', *Geo. Journ.* 119 (1953), 142-3.
   [17] Engels (above, n. 7), p. 21. The Sinai

represents only one of a great many barren
regions in Asia where the Macedonians would
need special logistic planning.
   [18] See Engels, op. cit., pp. 18 f., and also
Martin L. Van Creveld, *Supplying War: Army
Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cam-
bridge, 1977); and James A. Huston, *The
Sinews of War: Army Logistics 1775-1953*
(Washington, 1966). The logistic capabilities
of pre-industrial armies have been exhaust-
ively studied in these works and there is no
need to study the same problems again in
this paper. The reader is urged to consult
these works for further information.
   [19] Engels (above, n. 7), pp. 56, 38, 27.

concerning harvest dates, the location of suitable routes, transport facilities, and districts of agricultural production in the territories through which the army would march. A wrong turn or untrustworthy guides could lead the army into disaster, as happened to the armies of Crassus before Carrhae and Julian on his return from Mesopotamia.[20] It must be remembered that the roads of Asia during Alexander's time did not resemble modern roads or even the roads of the Roman Empire, with paved thoroughfares, and road signs or milestones located at convenient intervals giving directions and distances. Even the Persian Royal Road was no more than a series of stations located at 12 to 17 mile intervals. Hence, Alexander could not merely 'follow the Royal Road' from Sardis to Susa to reach his destinations, like a traveller today on a modern highway with road signs.[21] In fact, except for the short distances from Celaenae to Caesarea-Mazaca and from Arbela to Kirkuk, Alexander was never on the Royal Road but followed subsidiary roads.[22] While the paths of these roads could doubtless be ascertained by numerous hoof marks and wheel ruts, each road was part of a network of routes, only a few of which contained adequate resources to maintain an army. Accurate intelligence was required to determine the precise routes the Macedonians would have to follow.

Alexander employed different procedures for collecting tactical intelligence in different circumstances. Procedures changed before the army entered a friendly region, when it entered a hostile region, and before it encountered a large enemy field army.

The collection of intelligence was greatly simplified when the local officials of a region surrendered to Alexander before the army marched into their territory. Alexander regularly received the surrenders of officials before entering a new territory throughout his campaigns and they played an essential role in his logistic and tactical planning.[23] Usually such deputations came to Alexander of their own accord but occasionally they were summoned by the king through heralds.[24] Strategic and perhaps some tactical information could also be provided by them concerning neighbouring nations.[25]

Intelligence concerning the correct routes for the army to follow was also easily available under these circumstances since guides would be furnished by the officials who met Alexander at their border. These guides were often of the highest rank and would therefore serve as hostages for their own satisfactory performance.[26] Wherever possible, Alexander always required the services of more than one guide, so that each one could act as a check and a source of independent verification for his colleagues.[27] The use of guides often required the services of interpreters, especially in Alexander's later campaigns. The king

[20] Crassus: Plut. *Crass.* 21–2, Julian: Amm. Marc. 24.7.3. Cf. the problems Hannibal encountered while crossing the Alps when guides led him into an ambush, Polyb. 3.52.7–8.

[21] As in Robin Lane Fox, *Alexander the Great* (New York, 1974), p. 103.

[22] For the Royal Road from Sardis to Susa, see Hdt. 5.52–4, 8.98. The route of the road in Anatolia has been restored by Frederick S. Starr, 'Mapping Ancient Roads in Anatolia', *Archaeology* 16 (1963), 162–9, and the whole route by Victor W.

Von Hagen, 'The Horror of the Tomissa Crossing', *Geographical Magazine* 48 (1976), 278–81.

[23] Engels (above, n. 7), p. 41.

[24] A. 4.22.6, C. 8.13.2.

[25] See above, n. 13.

[26] C. 8.10.1–2, A. 4.15.4.

[27] C. 3.13.4, C. 5.3.5–6, C. 5.4.20, C. 8.10.2, C. 9.8.30–9, 9.1, C. 9.9.5–6, D. 17.55.3, D. 17.68.3–4, A. 1.25.9, A. 3.3. 4, A. 3.17.2, A. 3.18.4–5, A. 3.21.7, A. 4. 29.1, A. 4.30.7.

retained the services of several interpreters such as Pharnuches, Cophes, and Mithrines who were familiar with the languages and customs of many Iranian peoples.[28] The Macedonians seldom encountered hostile activity or supply problems in territories which surrendered in advance (although some Iranian regions rebelled after the army had passed through).

The collection of intelligence was greatly complicated when a region did not surrender to Alexander in advance. This occurred more frequently after he entered the Persian heartland in the winter of 330 BC, since the Iranians did not regard the Macedonians as liberators but as the destroyers of their own independence. Not to have surrendered to Alexander before he entered a territory was regarded as a hostile action and special operations were necessary to ensure the army's successful crossing.[29] Guides were still essential to the army's successful progress, not only for the logistic reasons already noted, but also to learn the strength and location of areas of enemy resistance. Occasionally, reliable guides could be obtained from a neighbouring territory that had already surrendered or had been subdued by Alexander. Their trustworthiness could perhaps be determined by the personal enmity they bore towards the countries against whom Alexander was advancing.[30] More often, however, such guides were unavailable and mounted skirmishers or scouts were used to guide the army in hostile territory until natives could be captured for that purpose.[31]

Under these circumstances, the native guides' reliability was more difficult to ascertain and a variety of methods was utilized to assure their trustworthiness as much as possible. The methods used in each individual case were probably determined by previous experience in dealing with native populations by Alexander himself or by his Iranian 'experts' Pharnuches or Mithrines, who doubtless knew the most persuasive techniques for acquiring intelligence from native Iranians. Under these circumstances we also find that more than one guide was used by Alexander wherever possible so that information from his colleagues could be verified independently.[32] Sometimes relatives of the guides would be taken as hostages to ensure good performance.[33] In desperate situations such as the turning of the Persian Gates or the besieging of Aornus, large rewards would be given to native guides for accurate intelligence.[34] While marching through hostile territory, mounted Macedonian skirmishers or scouts would often be sent forward from the main army to verify the accuracy of the native guides' reports.[35] Occasionally, deserters and prisoners could be used to supplement

[28] Pharnuches: A. 4.3.7, D. 17.68.4–5, C. 5.4.4; Cophes: C. 7.11.5–6; Mithrines: C. 3.12.6. Cf. D. 17.76.7, C. 6.5.19, C. 8.12. 9. Darius needed interpreters as well: C. 5.13.7.

[29] Engels (above, n. 7), pp. 71 f.

[30] A. 3.17.2; A. 4.15.4; cf. C. 4.7.8; C. 5.4.4–10; Riepl (above, n. 8), p. 468. Xen. Anab. 4.7.19.

[31] C. 3.13.1–5, cf. C. 9.8.30–9. 9.1, A. 4.30.6–7, Aeneas Tacticus 6, Onasander 6.7.

[32] See above, n. 27. Cf. Xen. Anab. 3.2.20, 4.1.21–25.

[33] C. 8.11.3–4, C. 7.2.18. Cf. Xen. Anab. 4.6.1.

[34] D. 17.68.4–6, D. 17.85.4–5, C. 5.7. 12, C. 8.11.3. Cf. Xen. Anab. 4.7.27.

[35] C. 6.4.14, while crossing the Shemshir-cur Pass over the Elburz Range into Hyrcania. Although no guides are mentioned in the passage, presumably it was not by mere coincidence that Alexander took one of the major passes over the Elburz Range, but it was probable that guides were leading him. For the route see, A. F. von Stahl, 'Notes on the March of Alexander the Great from Ecbatana to Hyrcania', Geo. Journ. 64 (1924), 324–6; P. Pédech, 'Deux campaignes d'Antiochus III chez Polybe', REA 60 (1958), 75–6.

information from other sources concerning routes.[36] As far as can be determined, it appears that all information obtained from guides and scouts was reported directly to Alexander himself without intermediaries except interpreters where needed. Although this evidence may reflect the bias of our sources, it may also reflect Alexander's genuinely important role in the intelligence procedures of his army and reminds one of Napoleon's statement, 'A general who has to see things through other peoples' eyes will never be able to command an army as it should be commanded.' and Wellington's, 'The real reason I succeeded . . . is because I was always on the spot. I saw everything and did everything myself.'[37] This practice would enable the king to question and learn from the sources directly about needed intelligence, and this in turn gave him the opportunity to obtain the precise information he wanted, and lessened the possibility of the distortion of information through intermediaries.

In some locations, Alexander was forced to make important tactical decisions without obtaining intelligence from local sources through usual procedures, and the use of reconnaissance operations was necessary. In the Oreitans' territory, he was faced with the decision of whether to march along the coastal route of the Makran or inland through the Gedrosian Desert to the Gedrosian capital at Pura. Apparently, no guides at all could be found who were acquainted with the coastal route,[38] so Alexander sent Thoas with a reconnaissance squad to make a deep penetration along the coast and report on conditions there. He reported back that the coast was completely desert inhabited by a few fishermen living in huts made from fish carcases. On the basis of this intelligence Alexander decided to take the inland route through the Gedrosian Desert to Pura where there were some supplies, although these were far from adequate. Even under these difficult circumstances, Alexander attempted to find the route best supplied with food and water before committing his army for the march.

Procedures for the acquisition of intelligence changed again when the Macedonians drew near a large opposing field army. Although the sources for Alexander's advance intelligence on enemy armies are not always recorded by our ancient authorities, the evidence we do possess indicates that deserters from the opposing force played a major role in transmitting this information. Although the Persians tried to maintain silence about the location of their king while on campaign as a counter-intelligence measure, Alexander received a continuous flow of information about Darius and his armies.[39] This flow increased as the

[36] A. 4.29.4; cf. Onasander 10.15. Prisoners that had been captured on previous occasions were also used as guides for territory with which they were familiar, A. 3.18.4–5; C. 5.4.20. Their reliability was probably checked by the same methods as those used for other guides. Notably Laomedon, who was bilingual in Persian and Greek was placed in charge of Persian prisoners, A. 3.6.6. Cf. Xen. Anab. 3.5.15.

[37] Whenever our sources inform us who is questioning guides, prisoners, spies, or scouts, it is always Alexander himself, never a subordinate (except of course, when subordinates were sent on their own missions, C. 3.13.1–4): D. 17.68.4–6, A. 3.18.

4–5, A. 3.21.7, A. 4.30.7, C. 5.3.5–6, A. 4. 24.8, A. 5.15.2, A. 6.8.4, C. 5.4.10. The quotations from Napoleon and Wellington are in J. F. C. Fuller, The Generalship of Alexander the Great (London, 1958), pp. 291–2.

[38] C. 9.10.8. The Ichthyophagai, who dwelt along the Makran coast had no social, commercial, or diplomatic relations with their neighbours. The Macedonian fleet found them completely lacking ports and sailing vessels for travel and commerce, Arr. Ind. 24–30. On occasion, naval reconnaissances were used as well, A. 2.7.2, A. 7.20.

[39] D. 17.31.6, D. 17.32.2, C. 3.1.10,

Persians became increasingly demoralized after successive defeats, until during
the pursuit of Darius across Media and Comisene in the Spring and Summer of
330 BC, Alexander was informed about the status, size, and location of the
fleeing Persians by a veritable flood of deserters, who were often Persians them-
selves of the highest rank.[40] Perhaps the king was kept informed of Darius'
progress before the battles of Issus and Gaugamela by deserters (perhaps from
Greek or non-Iranian contingents), captured scouts, or by Macedonian agents
in the Greek mercenary ranks.[41] In any event, it would be difficult indeed to
keep the location and movement of any large field army a secret for long
because of the extensive preparations and logistic support required for its
passage along its intended route. Alexander also obtained intelligence concerning
the terrain of the region in which the engagement would occur, in order to plan
and prepare the necessary logistic support and to utilize any natural advantages
to the fullest extent possible.[42]

First contact with the opposing army was made by scouts or mounted
skirmishers (prodromoi) who were regularly sent ahead of the main army when
contact with advance units of a hostile army was expected. This versatile tactical
arm, heavily armed with the sarissa, was also used for rapid pursuits, for charges
against enemy strategic positions, and they were posted in front of the right
wing of the main army in major battles.[43]

C. 3.5.6, C. 3.5.10, C. 4.9.11, C. 5.13.1,
C. 5.13.7, C. 5.13.2-3, C. 5.13.9, C. 5.13.
11, A. 2.6.1, A. 3.19.1, A. 3.19.3, A. 3.19.4,
A. 3.21.4-5, A. 3.21.7, J. 11.8.1. All this
information was obtained about Persian
armies before contact was made with them
by Macedonian scouts. Persian custom of
maintaining silence: C. 4.6.5-7. Much of
this information was supplied by deserters,
see nn., 40 and 41.

[40] Deserters in Media and Comisene:
A. 3.19.4, A. 3.19.5, A. 3.21.1, A. 3.25.3,
C. 5.13.2-3, C. 5.13.7, C. 5.13.9, C. 5.13.
11, cf. C. 5.13.1, A. 3.19.1, A. 3.19.3, A.
3.21.4-5, A. 3.21.7.

[41] Deserters and traitors were a common
source, perhaps the most common, for
obtaining information about enemy forces:
see n. 40 and A. 3.29.6, A. 4.29.4, A. 5.23.
6, C. 7.4.19, C. 5.5.2, D. 17.31.3. Deserters
were often highly rewarded for valuable
information, D. 17.83.8. Individual decisions
to desert seem to have been based heavily
on the morale in the deserter's army or
city. The morale was based not only on the
leadership in the deserter's army but also
on Alexander's success in battle, reputation,
and policies. Indeed, the king is said to have
remarked that he had won far more through
his reputation for invincibility than in
actual fighting, C. 4.4.2. In fact, one of
the reasons for Alexander's generally lenient
treatment of surrendered populations was
to lower the morale of his opponents, weaken

their will to resist, and enable intelligence
from high-ranking natives to be collected
more easily. Other policies which would
weaken adversaries' morale were Alexander's
great speed and surprise manœuvres, his
swift, thorough suppression of revolts, and
the apparent invincibility of his army.
Captured scouts: A. 3.7.4, agents: cf. Starr
(above, n. 2), p. 16. Perhaps the Greek
mercenary Bion, who deserted to the
Macedonians before the battle of Gauga-
mela with information of the caltrops planted
by the Persians on the battlefield, was a
Macedonian agent (C. 4.13.36). It is also
possible that he was a Persian counter-
intelligence agent who supplied the
Macedonians with false information to
confuse their battle plans. However, this is
unlikely, because a reconnaissance of the
battlefield, which was indeed undertaken
before the engagement, could easily ascer-
tain the truth (A. 3.9.4-5) and the agent's
life would be in jeopardy if his report was
false. Bion was placed under guard after
giving his report to the king (C. 4.13.37),
probably until the veracity of his report
could be determined.

[42] A. 3.7.3, Engels (above, n. 7), 44 f.

[43] D. 17.33.1, A. 1.13.2, A. 3.7.7,
A. 3.21.2, A. 5.15.2, A. 6.8.5, C. 3.8.17-
18, C. 4.10.9, C. 4.10.11, C. 4.12.1-5. For
the use of prodromoi see, H. Berve, Das
Alexanderreich auf prosopographischer
Grundlage, I (Munich, 1926), pp. 129-35;
William Kendrick Pritchett, Ancient Greek

III

The best way to surprise an opponent and deny him the time and knowledge necessary to plan and prepare an effective defence is to prevent him from learning one's own plans by using counter-intelligence procedures. These procedures can be divided into two types: active and passive. The former seeks to deceive an opponent deliberately by providing false information, or by using ruses, feints, or demonstrations; while the latter seeks to deny him accurate information about plans and intentions through secrecy.[44]

The classic example of Alexander's active counter-intelligence procedures is of course, his deception of Porus before the battle of the Hydaspes.[45] Here, Alexander lulled Porus' vigilance by conducting numerous, noisy feints for crossing the river directly across from Porus' camp before secretly crossing about 17 miles upstream. Alexander even ordered an individual disguised as himself to remain in the Macedonian camp to deceive the Indians across the river, while he himself was crossing upstream. The king also used numerous false retreats to deceive his militarily unsophisticated Indian opponents about his true intentions in battle.[46] False orders were also issued in special circumstances to confuse an adversary or his agents in the Macedonian camp.[47] Great speed and surprise manœuvres were frequently important elements in Alexander's tactics and they could often effectively thwart an enemy's knowledge of Alexander's intentions until it was too late to plan countermeasures.[48]

Passive counter-intelligence measures were also used by Alexander to prevent accurate information about Macedonian strategic and tactical planning from reaching opponents both within and outside the camp. One common method was to restrict the individuals permitted to attend strategic and tactical councils to important, trusted commanders.[49] In fact, the rank and file were often kept in the dark about Alexander's strategic plans.[50] In Comisene for example, after Darius' death, many soldiers assumed that the Asian campaign was over and it was now time to return home. They were soon disillusioned. When important strategic and tactical decisions were made, mounted guards were posted at the entrance to the camp (which was regularly fortified with a ditch and palisade, thus limiting access and egress), and nearby roads would be patrolled by cavalry to prevent messages being sent to opponents.[51] When it was necessary to transmit

Military Practices, Part 1, University of California Publications: Classical Studies, vol. 7 (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 127–32. Yet another method of acquiring intelligence— or so some Macedonians thought—was from the gods themselves through the seers Aristander and Demophon (D. 17.98.3, A. 1.25.8, A. 2.18.1, C. 4.2.14, C. 4.6.12). They were regularly consulted before any major engagement or undertaking, or after an ominous occurrence, and our sources record that their predictions were invariably correct. This leads one to believe that their 'predictions' were either written *post hoc* for dramatic effect, or since the predictions were generally favourable to the Macedonians, they may have been used by the king to boost morale.

[44] Glass and Davidson (above, n. 2), 101 f.
[45] A. 5.10–12, C. 8.13.17–23. Cf. Xen. *Anab.* 3.5.13.
[46] D. 17.85.7, A. 4.26.2–3.
[47] C. 6.8.15. Cf. Philip's false march order to Amphissa when in fact he was marching to Elatea, Polyaenus 4.2.8.
[48] D. 17.4.5, A. 1.4.3, A. 1.7.5, A. 7. 28.3.
[49] C. 4.13.3, C. 6.8.1, A. 3.9.3, A. 2.6.1. Cf. Xen. *Anab.* 3.5.14–17.
[50] C. 6.2.15, C. 6.8.15, cf. Str. 2.1.6, Onasander 10.22, Starr (above, n. 2), p. 16.
[51] C. 6.8.18, cf. Aeneas Tacticus 22, 24, Onasander 26.1–2, C. 7.2.28.

important messages across unsubdued or hostile territory, the messengers were often disguised and they sometimes committed their messages to memory so they would possess no written documents if they were captured.[52] Document security was maintained by the use of seal rings and seals on important messages.[53] The seals would prevent them from being opened without discovery and since the seals identified the sender, it may have been possible for messengers to detect letters coming into camp from an enemy, sealed with an unknown device.[54]

Alexander employed an organization of agents and informants among his own ranks to report on suspicious activities among his officers and men. Such precautions were not entirely without justification as the long record of assassination plots, palace intrigues, and treachery against previous Macedonian monarchs indicates.[55] Philotas in particular was watched by his mistress Antigone, who was ordered to give regular reports on his activities directly to the king.[56] Agents among the rank and file informed Alexander of the troops' reaction to Parmenio's death.[57] Apparently it was considered a capital crime for any soldier not to report immediately any conspiracy, real or alleged, against the king.[58] This would encourage individual soldiers to be vigilant since a failure to report a suspicious incident of which they had knowledge might implicate themselves. Finally, the interception of important documents sent to and from the Macedonian camp also reflects the activities of an organized system of intelligence agents within the army. Some time before Philotas' trial and execution, all letters the troops had written home were intercepted and read, and those reporting unfavourably about military service were placed in a special unit in disgrace.[59] Agents were probably responsible for capturing the letter from Darius' camp to Sisines before it was delivered, and the letter of Darius to Alexander's Greek troops before the battle of Gaugamela,[60] since the capture of

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[52] A. 1.25.9–10, C. 7.2.17–19, cf. Aeneas Tacticus 31.

[53] C. 3.7.12–14.

[54] This was apparently how the letter to Sisines from the Persian commander Nabarzanes was intercepted before it reached him (C. 3.7.14). The letter was intercepted, read by Alexander, re-sealed by him with a foreign seal, and re-delivered to Sisines to see if he would report the treasonable material in the letter to the king as a test of his loyalty. Sisines recognized that the seal on the letter was foreign, and presumably knowledge about the types of seals used by prominent Macedonians would have been known to others as well. Alternatively, the foreign messengers carrying enemy letters into the Macedonian camp may have been recognized and stopped, and their letters intercepted in this way. Unfortunately, there is no information concerning the methods used to intercept suspicious letters coming into and sent from the Macedonian camp.

[55] Darius had agents in the Macedonian camp, at least according to the letter of

Alexander to Darius preserved in A. 2.14.6.

[56] P. 48.4–5. Information from agents concerning intelligence given to adversaries of the king would be counter-intelligence, while information concerning plots directed against the king would be intelligence. Non-military intelligence of this nature may have been distorted or obstructed on occasion by intermediaries (cf. C. 6.7.16–23), but such obstruction could have fatal consequences, as Philotas learned.

[57] C. 7.2.35–36. Presumably, this important information was not obtained fortuitously, but by the king's orders from those he could trust.

[58] C. 3.7.12–15, C. 6.7.26.

[59] C. 7.2.36.

[60] C. 4.10.16–17, C. 3.7.14, cf. C. 6.9.13. These agents were probably ordinary soldiers, servants, or followers such as Antigone who were found to be loyal to the king. They probably behaved no differently from anyone else, for if they acted suspiciously, their intelligence-collecting roles would soon be discovered and their effectiveness eliminated. It will

such vital documents could scarcely have been a fortuitous occurrence. Unfortunately, the agents operated in secret and except for Antigone, one can only see the results of their activities, not the agents themselves or the methods they used.

Perhaps it is not entirely out of place to note that like the Macedonians, the Persians had an efficient intelligence system which informed Darius and his staff of the location and status of the Macedonian army and its king at all times. The Persians used the same methods to obtain intelligence as the Macedonians: deserters from Macedonian ranks, scouts, the interrogation of natives, and agents within the Macedonian camp who sought to suborn Alexander's associates. Darius needed interpreters as well, perhaps to question captured Macedonian scouts or agents within his own camp, as well as to deal with his own Greek troops.[61]

Possibly, Darius used active counter-intelligence measures against the Macedonians on at least one occasion. When the Macedonians marched eastward from Thapsacus across northern Mesopotamia in the summer of 331 BC, they captured some Persian scouts, who under interrogation informed Alexander that the Persian army was already encamped on the east bank of the Tigris River, ready to block the Macedonians' crossing.[62] If the scouts' report has been correctly recorded, it is quite wrong; Darius was nowhere near any Tigris ford when Alexander arrived. One may draw the inference that these Persian scouts were ordered to lie deliberately to Alexander upon capture as a counter-intelligence measure. Darius may have attempted to persuade Alexander to turn down the Euphrates Valley to Babylon by this method, since this prize of war was supposedly undefended, and since his army would have been extremely vulnerable if they proceeded onwards to ford the Tigris River in the face of Persian opposition. Moreover, making the Macedonians march to Babylon while the Persian army was supposedly encamped in the northern Tigris Valley would have cut the Persians off from their logistic, administrative, and financial base in Mesopotamia and placed the Macedonian army in an excellent strategic position.

In fact of course, the Persian army was still near Babylon when this ruse occurred, and making the Macedonians march there would save the huge Persian army an arduous march up the Tigris Valley and spare them the task of finding and preparing a new battlefield and organizing logistic support. Furthermore, by supposedly leaving Babylon undefended, the Macedonians would be lured down the Euphrates Valley, which after the harvests in June would have had few accessible supplies for the army, since these would have been stored behind the massive fortifications of the cities of the middle and lower valley on the approach of an enemy army.[63] However, Alexander did not accept the story (perhaps he had accurate intelligence from other sources) and he continued his march to the Tigris.

IV

There were at least two major failures in Alexander's intelligence system: in

be noted that the apologetic Arrian omits any mention of these agents and their activities.

[61] Information about Alexander and the army: C. 3.7.1, C. 4.9.1-2, C. 4.9.7, C. 5.8.2; deserters: A. 1.25.3; scouts: C. 4.12.1-5,

A. 3.7.4; interrogation of natives: C. 3.8.24; agents in the Macedonian camp: A. 2.14.6; interpreters: C. 5.13.7.

[62] A. 3.7.4. Cf. Xen. *Anab.* 2.4.16-24.

[63] The practice was well known, Aeneas Tacticus 7.2-5, A. 1.26.5.

Sogdia while battling against the elusive Spitamenes and in the Gedrosian desert concerning the nature of the monsoon winds. Both failures seem to have occurred for similar reasons.[64]

From the summer of 329 to the summer of 327, Alexander was pinned down by the repeated revolts of Sogdia instigated by the Sogdian cavalry commander Spitamenes. It was always Alexander's practice to pursue his enemies until they surrendered or were finally destroyed, but in this instance he did not. The reason for this seems to have been that the king could not obtain accurate intelligence concerning the desert routes of eastern Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan used by the rebels. The region in question consists of vast expanses of moving sand dunes with small oases located at distant intervals forming desert routes connecting the Amu, Zeravshan, and Syr river valleys, and the oases of Bokhara and Merv. The constant movement of the dunes obliterates all trails in a short period and travellers here are obliged to travel at night by the stars to reach their destinations.[65] The slightest error in direction could cause an expedition to miss an oasis and perish in a trackless desert.

Nevertheless, the routes were known to many Sogdians as is shown by Spitamenes' frequent use of them for attacking Macedonian outposts along the Sogdian river valleys. Yet, apparently, no Sogdian would provide the Macedonians with needed information concerning these routes so that pursuits of the rebels could be organized. The reason for this seems to have been the ideological nature of the resistance of the Sogdian population to the Macedonian invaders. In no region was a more ruthless suppression of rebellion undertaken by Alexander: at one time, the entire length of the fertile and populous Zeravshan valley was completely devastated by Macedonian troops and all the inhabitants of military age slain.[66] Whole cities were destroyed and their inhabitants killed, and Diodorus records that 120,000 Sogdians were killed by the Macedonians during three successive revolts.[67] Under these circumstances, it was doubtful whether the Sogdians would provide trustworthy guides to lead the Macedonians through the desert: they were both intensely hostile to Macedonian rule and there were probably few indeed who had not suffered at the hands of Alexander's troops. Spitamenes' forays had to be checked by other means.

To plan and prepare a successful march through the Gedrosian Desert, extensive knowledge of the region's climate, rainfall, distances, topography, and agricultural resources had to be collected first. Alexander was able to obtain part of this intelligence, but not all. For example, from information concerning the resources and extent of the region, he correctly calculated that the army would need to carry a four-month supply of food to cross the desert successfully.[68] As was mentioned earlier, the army could only remain self-sufficient in food for about ten days in a desert such as the Gedrosian, and hence, the four months' supplies were apparently to be transported by the fleet which was to sail alongside the army while it marched along the coast.[69] However, Alexander

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[64] One might add a third failure before the battle of Issus, but since this has been discussed numerous times (most recently by C. L. Murison, 'Darius III and the Battle of Issus', Historia 21 (1972), 399–423 and Engels (above, n. 7), pp. 41 f.) it will not be included here. The reader is directed to the divergent views of these two authors.

[65] C. 7.4.28–9. For the nature of the country see, O. Olufsen, The Emir of Bokhara and his Country (Copenhagen, 1911), C. 7.4.26–31. Cf. A. 3.3.4, A. 6.26.4.
[66] C. 7.9.22, A. 4.6.5.
[67] D. Introduction to Book 17, part 2.
[68] A. 6.20.5.
[69] Engels (above, n. 7), pp. 112 f.

did not learn that the monsoon winds in this region blow steadily from the south-west from mid-July to late October, thus preventing the passage of any ancient vessel sailing west along the Makran coast during this period[70] and destroying his planned logistic co-ordination between the fleet and the land army.

As in Sogdia, there was intensive opposition to Macedonian rule in southern India which was reflected by the numerous revolts led in part by the Brahman caste.[71] Alexander had difficulty in obtaining guides to the Indus delta from Pattala and when some natives had been captured for this purpose, they quickly escaped.[72] When the tide retreated and left the Macedonian fleet stranded in a tidal inlet, Alexander had to send a reconnaissance patrol to the mouth of the Indus to report whether the tide would return, since apparently no Indian told Alexander about the tides. As was noted, Alexander used such patrols when information could not be obtained by other means.[73] After the Macedonian land army had left Pattala, the Indians attempted to drive the fleet from the city's harbour.[74] Doubtless too, communicating with the natives was becoming increasingly difficult and probably more than one interpreter was now required for the translation of the local Indian dialects into Greek. These circumstances would not ameliorate any feelings of suspicion or distrust on either side.

In addition to native hostility to the Macedonians, the inhabitants of the lower Indus Valley seem to have lacked knowledge about the Indian Ocean.[75] In Alexander's era, there was apparently no commercial use of the Indian Ocean as a trade route between the Indus Delta and southern Persia or Mesopotamia. The Macedonian fleet found the Ichthyophagai who dwelt along the Makran coast living in total isolation from their neighbours, possessing neither ports, nor large sailing vessels necessary for commerce.[76] Thus, another reason for the intelligence failure in southern India was the natives' lack of knowledge about the effect of the monsoon winds on the performance of sailing vessels (though presumably, they knew as well as anyone which direction the wind blew from July to October).

A third reason for the intelligence failure may have been the shortage of time in which the Macedonians could collect information about the Makran before embarking on their march. Although the exact chronology of 325 is difficult to reconstruct, Alexander seems to have arrived in Pattala in late June or early July and left the city when the monsoon rains began, or about mid-July, so his army could be supplied with water along the Makran coast.[77] This left Alexander little time to collect intelligence and he may have been forced to march before collecting sufficient data concerning the monsoon winds.

V

It is hoped that this sketch of Alexander's intelligence system has shed some

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[70] Ibid., p. 114. Ancient sailing vessels could not sail closer than seven points off the wind, Lionel Casson, *The Ancient Mariners* (New York, 1959), p. 220.

[71] A. 6.16.3–6.18.1, Str. 15.2.5.

[72] A. 6.18.4, C. 9.8.30–9.9.1. New guides could not be found.

[73] C. 9.9.9–25 and n. 38.

[74] Str. 15.2.5.

[75] C. 9.9.5–6.

[76] C. 9.10.8, Arr. *Ind.* 24–30.

[77] Str. 15.1.7, Str. 15.2.3, Engels (above, n. 7), p. 112.

light on the role of intelligence for his strategic and tactical planning. Although failures did occur, few commanders in any era seem to have made better use of military intelligence for making effective strategic and tactical decisions. While the military functions of Alexander's subordinates are often neglected by our sources, it appears that he exercised direct supervision over many intelligence operations himself and seldom if ever delegated this important authority to anyone. Alexander would never commit the safety and well-being of his troops on any military operation without careful preparation. This preparation in turn was based on planning, and the planning on accurate intelligence, although these aspects of the campaigns are generally ignored by the sources. Indeed Bellinger notes:[78]

The records tell us a great deal about the accomplishments of Alexander but little or nothing of what lay behind them. There is tactical information about his arrangement of the order of battle, . . . but operations on a larger scale are treated as though they were an automatic sequence. And yet, of course, a prodigious amount of planning must have been required for the success of the all but incredible progress of his arms and of this, Alexander must have been the master mind. . . . But it was not the kind of thing that antiquity found worthy of recording, and Alexander is not the only great ruler whose plans are entirely unreported.

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[78] Alfred R. Bellinger, *Essays on the Coinage of Alexander the Great*, American Numismatic Society Study 11 (1963), p. 38.