

1977

## On the Psychology of Military Incompetance

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### Recommended Citation

Delaney, Robert F. and Dixon, Norman F. (1977) "On the Psychology of Military Incompetance," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 30 : No. 4 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol30/iss4/12>

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Japanese facility has allowed him to make full use of sources in that language. There is, in fact, not much else available in English on Japanese naval policy in this period, except for some sections of Ian Nish's excellent *Alliance in Decline*. Since a great deal of work has already been done on British and American naval policy at this time, the author's work here contributes more that is new in interpretation than in information. While this book will not make Harold and Margaret Sprout's classic *Toward a New Order of Sea Power* obsolete, Professor Dingman's sources are richer than those which were available in 1940. In their treatment of the American origins of the Washington naval treaties the Sprouts also emphasized the importance of domestic politics, which they analyzed principally from press opinion and congressional debates.

Professor Dingman's comparative approach and his focus on domestic politics make his work an important contribution to the study of international arms limitation. His approach provides a new perspective for viewing previous strategic and diplomatic studies of the period, and he is persuasive in contending that domestic political considerations were central to the formation of the naval policies which brought the United States, Great Britain and Japan to their agreements at the Washington Conference. Nevertheless, an important economic reality underlay these political considerations. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War all three of the great naval powers suffered sharp recessions, which brought public pressure for the reduction of defense expenditures. Moreover, it must be remembered that the Washington naval limitation treaty came at a time when the governments and navies of the great naval powers all generally expected a long period of peace. The British Cabinet's famous "Ten Year Rule" of August 1919 which stipulated

that the service departments should draft their estimates "on the assumption that the British Empire would not be engaged in any great war during the next ten years," was only the most obvious example of this attitude. When governments and navies begin to fear that war is approaching, as they did in the 1930's, they behave very differently. It is then, and not in postwar periods like the 1920's—or the 1970's—that questions of strategic planning, weapons technologies, diplomatic balance, and economic power all assume a new importance and urgency in the politics of national defense.

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Dixon, Norman F. *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*. New York: Basic Books, 1976. 447pp.

Ah, what a treat! What a delight to carry through the passageways of the Pentagon. What a military show stopper! The full sweep of Parkinsonian reaction is evident from passersby before the dust jacket gives way to page 1. What makes the potential reader so nervous about this book? Can it be the title? Can it be something even subtler? Can it possibly even remotely be the hint of criticism? Actually, British psychologist Norman Dixon tenders us the gentle surprise. This is a serious book, with a serious message, and a wealth of historical and organizational data to backstop the author's thesis: Military disasters, short of random chance, follow a pattern based on social psychology and bureaucratic traits, thus, on the one hand individuals may be bred to military life, but these very same men (and now women) may not be suited at all to the standards of military greatness. A dilemma, you say? Not at all. The first lesson learned is that Dixon is as much speaking of any major hierarchy and, certainly, watching bureaucracy on the Potomac as it goes

its merry way, one instantly senses he is also addressing any large modern organization. The bottom line of this fascinating work emerges with force. How can overcontrol, rigidity, and inflexibility mesh with managing the great stresses and crises of world war. It is a chapter right out of tomorrow's lecture: "Managing the modern defense establishment." It is, as an impressed student once muttered, "nonquant all the way!" Dixon spares no one in his candid overview of British military leadership. From the Crimea to Singapore, to Arnhem; from dolts of the battlefield to geniuses; from Nelson to Rommel and Zhukov, they come under his steely and perceptive stare. Dixon should be read. He will make you uncomfortable and insecure. He will make you think. And maybe, just maybe, he will cause us to nod ever so slightly in the direction of change. This is a book no war college worth its competence should be without. Come, let us all be angry together.

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FitzGerald, C.P. *Mao Tse-tung and China*. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1976. 166pp.

Brief and readable, C.P. FitzGerald's most recent book is a good introduction to developments in 20th-century China and Mao's role in shaping these events. Although written by a senior academic in the field of Chinese studies, the book was not written for scholars of East Asia. It contains no footnotes and only a short reading list at the end.

The book is straightforwardly arranged by chronology. The first seven chapters deal with discrete periods of time and articulate Mao's involvement and growth in stature during these periods. The chapters by period are: Youth and Background; The Young Communist; Guerrilla War; Yenan and the Japanese War; The Last Civil War; Mao Tse-tung in Power: 1949-1957;

Policy Conflicts: 1957-1966; and The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. During the course of the narrative, the emphasis is sometimes on Mao, sometimes on revolution. As a compromise, the book is neither definitive biography nor complete history, although it does competently cover the major events of the periods reviewed.

FitzGerald's generally sympathetic view of the Chinese revolution gives the work a systematic bias. For instance, the author quotes an unnamed British diplomat's estimate of the number of people executed in the purges of the early 1950's as being between 100 and 150,000. This figure calls into question the more widely accepted figures in Western scholarship of several million executed. A second example is that he is much less critical than many American scholars of the Great Leap forward in the late 1950's, intimating that the droughts of that period would have resulted in mass famine had the Great Leap not taken place at all. FitzGerald's sympathetic views are worth consideration, but they should be weighed against other available studies.

The central thesis in the book is that Mao has been the main force in guiding the Chinese revolution and in making it successful. In the late summer of 1970, at the Second Session of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, Lin Piao and Ch'en Po-ta eulogized the theory of the "genius in history," naming Mao Tse-tung as an outstanding example of the theory in practice. Mao's subsequent speech strongly condemned the genius in history theory, Mao himself seeming to be afraid of what he called "kicks under the table while hiding the feet." The account of these events in the chapter on Lin Piao is one of the more valuable aspects of the book. It shows how the "kicks under the table" turned into an assassination attempt on Mao by Lin, and how the response by Mao was swift and deadly.