

## **“ Cost Benefit Analysis.”**

**The** Americans detected them first. A vast spacecraft, similar in size to Belgium, moving into our solar system. It took nine months to reach Earth.

The major powers were quick to consult, but only after Washington had attempted to communicate with the craft. The reply was a mathematical formula, which NASA scientists lunged at, and dismantled, and then came back to their political and military masters.

The formula was for a form of radio signal that reacted with fissile material.

Fissile material?

That’s right, said the scientists. Like weapons grade plutonium, or uranium.

Like nuclear warheads, the generals asked, shifting in their seats.

Exactly, the scientists replied. And by react they meant caused to explode.

The Pentagon went immediately into crisis meeting, and then came back to the President with an opinion. We can’t fire our nuclear weapons at this thing. They’ll detonate before they get anywhere near it. The diplomats weighed in with a slightly more positive observation. If this obviously intelligent race can detonate all our nuclear weapons and reactors at will, why did they tell us? Why did they not just do it?

Because, the generals said, they want the planet.

**The** President looked far older than she had when she had taken office three years previously, but then that perception was probably biased by the fact that, as a woman, she was judged by different standards. Men apparently can look more dignified, whereas women, she fumed, just get old, and there’s no law you can pass to change that. The fact that the war was not going well was not helping, either.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Straker, was summarizing his report.

“ In short, madam president, our force depletion is massive. The Invaders ( It was always that. Invaders with a capital I, as no one had come up with a better title for the enemy.) technology is about 25 years in advance of ours. We are having success shooting down their aircraft or destroying their armoured vehicles, but at massive cost.” The general pointed to a chart now displayed on all the view screens in the situation room. All assorted military and civilian eyes turned.

“ We lose 42 fighters for every one of theirs. We lose 48 tanks or other mobile armoured platforms to every one of theirs. It costs us about 270 men for every one of theirs we kill.”

He then tapped on the screen, and the image changed to a map centred on Northern Iraq.

“ Since their craft started landing in Kurdistan four months ago, they have advanced into Russia, Turkey, Greece, Serbia, Austria and are fighting their way into southern Germany. They have also moved east into Pakistan, Afghanistan and are poised to enter India. Now, CIA have a theory about the invasion, based on new satellite images.”

Foster, the CIA director, stood up, and the images changed again, this time to an overhead shot of a facility.

“ This was taken two days ago over the landing site in Iraq. We believe it is a concentration camp.” He let the words sink in for a moment, and a wave of murmur and expletives carry across the room.

“ However, I use that term in its original context. We do not believe it is as much a death camp as a place for storing the large numbers of the human population whom the Invaders seem to capture and herd back to here. People who have escaped from the camp tell us that conditions, although crowded and uncomfortable, are not unbearable. However, this is the important bit.”

He changed the image to a picture of a row of the Invaders’ massive landing craft.

“ There is a constant stream of craft going to and from the mother-ship. The ones going are loaded with humans. The ones returning are, we believe, for the most part, empty. For some reason, they are taking our people.”

CIA sat down, and the briefing continued around the room, with little option being offered other than to continue fighting. The Army and Air Force demanded more resources. The Navy grumbled about losing all its aircraft and Marines.

The chairman called for any final submissions.

In the second tier of seats surrounding the large round table, a young and nervous officer rose.

The chairman had to pause, to remind himself as to the speaker.

“ Eh, Major Lake, from the General Accounting Office, right?”

The young officer nodded.

“ Yes, general, thank you. We’ve been working on the figures for sometime now. Force depletion, kill ratios, re-supply and replacement rates. Madam President, we are going to win the war. But I don’t think we will want to.”

The room murmured and sniggered in equal measure, but Lake continued. He signaled a junior to put up his first display.

“ We at GAO do the cost analysis, projections on expenditure, etc, and we’ve been doing it for this conflict. As you are aware, all the major industrial powers have geared their economies towards fighting the invasion. War production across the world is pumping out troops and equipment at an extraordinary rate. We, that is, the US and her allies, are building tanks and aircraft faster than the Invader can destroy them, and we can sustain this for quite a few years. Strangely, the Invaders don’t seem to have understood the global economic system, in that they are fighting our frontline forces whilst seemingly ignoring the oil refineries and factories that replenish our forces.”

He signaled another change of screen. It displayed a mock-up of the mother-ship.

“ When you examine the Invader technology, we see that they are using advanced but essentially conventional technology. They came here very fast, by our standards, but not that fast. In short, we would see any re-supply ships coming, and there aren’t any. In other words, they had to bring everything they needed. Everything that we destroy is irreplaceable. Our kill rate is low, as the general said, but it is creeping up. Our pilots are getting the measure of theirs, and our tactics are getting better. When you consider that we have captured some of their equipment, it is only a matter of time before we can start manufacturing weapons similar to theirs. We can beat them, madam president, but it will take about 15 years to get to the point where we turn the war around.”

The major paused, essentially seeking the permission to continue with what was a radical proposition. She nodded her assent.

“ The problem, Madam President, is this. Defeating the Invaders will not be the biggest issue facing us. We can do *that*. The problem is that every industrialized state is throwing everything into the war effort. By the time it is over, we will all have run up debts running into trillions. We will have exhausted huge amounts of the planets resources, and effectively destroyed the global free market system. The planet will plunge into a global recession which will devastate the lives of all its people, and we will effectively be living about 400 hundreds years in the past in a barter system. The only way out will be to create a centrally controlled command economy enforced on the planet by massive armed force. In short, a communist dictatorship.”

General Straker had to stand and shout for silence, such was the commotion. Lake continued.

“ We have the figures for anyone who wishes to examine them. But there is an alternative. We have calculated the size of their ship, and in particular its cargo capacity. That is how we determined the total size of available combat resources to them. Intelligence also indicates that their attitude to their troops is not dissimilar to ours, in that they get medical assistance, and evacuate both their wounded and dead. so they will probably take their forces with them. If they abandon all their equipment, probably destroying it first to prevent its capture by us, and use some form of suspended animation storage system, they can fit, at most, about 700 million humans onto their ship. I personally think that figure is a bit on the high side, but it’s the working figure we are using at the moment.”

The President blanched, and stood up, as if struggling to catch her breath.

“ What are you proposing, Major?” She asked.

“ Their advance into Europe is slowing. Same with Russia. Some reports suggest they are actually setting up defensive positions, rather than advancing. They are turning east, and heading into Pakistan and India. They will run out of room before they ever reach us.”

“ Run out of *room*?”

“ Yes madam president. Fill their ship with Russians and Europeans but mostly Pakistanis and Indians. They will not be a threat to the continental United States because they will have what they seemingly want. Yet if we continue to fight, we will lose millions in people and indeed our very way of life. In summary, madam president, my advice is this. Let them win. It’s cheaper.”

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