



# 72 Hours

*By Retired Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Nelson*

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**L**ee peered through a window with a view of the nation's capital. It was early evening, and the sun was setting. The sunset had shades of purple and red. A slight fragrance of blooming cherry trees occasionally reached his nose. In the distance, a brood of ducks could be heard over the quiet stillness of the city. It was a gorgeous evening, but the deadline was almost here.

It'd been 71 hours since the invaders arrived in what Lee considered to be the most audacious and unprovoked attack in the history of the world. It was convergence on an entirely new level. Lee knew this to be true because he'd studied war at one of the best universities in the world, earning a Ph.D. in strategy and international relations. After graduating, he served

as an army intelligence officer for 15 years and was considered either brilliant or crazy by those he worked with. Although, considering the events of the last three days, he thought most of his peers would now put him in the brilliant category.

He'd seen this coming. He warned them of the dangers. He informed them of the hazards of the new technology. He gave countless presentations on the invaders' aggressive history. The bureaucrats turned a deaf ear. After all, no one could challenge our national power; it was just too great. They believed the country had technological overmatch, along with a well-trained army and the protection of half a world of ocean. No one in their right mind would attempt an

invasion. But to Lee, it was only a matter of time.

Seventy-one hours ago, there was a blink. Lee was on leave when the power went off. He thought it was a routine power failure, but everything went off. This wasn't quite right. Lee thought they were hit with an electromagnetic pulse. He'd studied weapons for 15 years; he knew how they worked. Everything that used electricity just stopped: cars, generators, electronic devices, phones, water pumps, all of it.

Thirty seconds later, apart from the internet, the cellphones, and the automobiles, it all came back on. Six minutes later, every military base and every airport in the country was hit with a hypersonic missile. There must have been hundreds of them.

As the news reported on these events, broadcasts showed a missile destroying an airfield in slow motion. Even at a reduced speed, it looked fast. The missile seemed to have a stealth skin and a powerful rocket engine. He believed no one saw them coming. The missiles were clearly using stealth technology, and the blip probably disabled the country's radar defenses.

A cyberattack likely happened simultaneously, to ensure all domains were contested, but Lee had no way of knowing. From what he could tell, most of the country was offline, and every known runway was turned into a giant pothole. He knew no warplanes would get into the fight. The country was a sitting duck.

Minutes later, tanker-sized aircraft, the likes of which he'd never seen, moved over every known military base in the country and released a clear mist that blanketed them and almost all the surrounding areas. Six minutes later, every soldier dropped dead. It was clear to Lee what had happened: The invaders used some sort of biological or chemical weapon.

The interesting thing was that the civilians weren't to be affected. Later, when the news reported on the deaths, the media said some sort of DNA-triggered virus caused the victim's blood to coagulate. The soldiers who died likely felt as though they were suffering a heart attack. This was some *War of the Worlds* technology that even H.G. Wells couldn't have predicted.

By this time, the country had activated its emergency response system. The emergency radio and television channel broadcasts were ordering everyone to stay

inside. Again, Lee knew what was happening, because he'd also warned his leaders about this. Somehow, the enemy hacked the military databases and stole the DNA sequence for the nation's soldiers.

Since everyone who wished to become a soldier had their DNA sequenced when they began their term of service, literally 100% of the military was at risk of a genetically engineered virus that only did its dirty work when paired with a matching strand of DNA. It was a brilliant feat of genetic engineering likely based on the same Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR) gene editing technique used to modify the COVID-19 virus.

Lee believed he only survived because he was on leave and nowhere near his base. If only his superiors had taken his warning seriously, they might have been able to prevent this weapon from being developed. But

now they were dead. They were all dead, everyone Lee worked with, and they had nothing to blame but their own hubris.

After the bombs and the mist, the news showed foreign aircraft flying over every city in the country. The aircraft released small weaponized drones. The drones most likely used AI, because they hunted

and shot anyone uniformed or carrying a gun. Police, firefighters, delivery men and women, armed civilians, anyone who appeared to have the ability to resist was shot in the street like a dog.

The city's police force tried to mount an attack, but the drones swarmed them and, like kamikazes, exploded when in range. Making it worse, Lee believed the drones were solar powered, because they'd periodically disappear above the clouds for an unknown time. Lee assumed they were recharging their batteries. This meant they never had to return to base. They just kept killing, recharging, and killing again. Or they exploded, killing multiple people. Whenever this happened, it seemed as though two more took their place.

The news continued to broadcast the hopelessness of the situation. This is when Lee realized what was really happening. They were not only being invaded, they were also going to be assimilated. The invaders didn't just want the natural resources and the land; they wanted the people, too.

Within four hours of the initial attack, the entire



country lost any means to resist, and the population was so terrified of the “mist” Lee knew they wouldn’t leave their homes. Even if they were armed, they were not going to come out, and even if they did, the endless drone patrols would hunt them down.

The invasion was fast, deadly, and meticulous.

It must have taken years to plan. Lee also recognized TV and radio signals still worked because the invaders allowed it. They shut off everything, then turned the signals back on to scare the population into submission. Their technology must be much more advanced than everyone believed. Even the spies were wrong or, more likely, fed misinformation. The enemy was as ruthless as it was relentless.

That evening, the soldiers arrived. They jumped in from airplanes and were utterly terrifying. They wore some sort of mechanical suit, and their eyes glowed slightly when shown on TV. By now, the only broadcasts were from security cameras, because reporters were afraid to go outside.

The combination of soldiers with glowing eyes and terminator drones had everyone terrified. To Lee, it was clear that mechanical enhancements augmented the soldiers, allowing them to see in the dark and act with more strength and endurance than normal humans. When he saw one of the soldiers flip a car by himself, Lee knew he was right. He was also scared out of his mind.

Lee remembered that shortly after midnight on the eve of the attack, he heard the country’s intercontinental ballistic missiles firing. He remembered the glimmer of hope this gave him. There must have been some sort of military still left, and the government had authorized a second strike.

While Lee believed this would lead to mutually assured destruction, he was glad because the invaders would get what was coming to them. They might be defeated, but the strike would wipe the enemy off the map.

This was a short-lived hope.

Almost immediately after the rockets launched, they exploded over the cities. There would be fallout, and more people would die.

Within minutes, the invaders took over the airwaves and sent two messages. First: “Resistance is futile. The next missile launch our quantum detectors sense will result in the complete destruction of an entire city.”

It was a line straight out of *Star Trek*, not something you’d hear in real life. If the invaders perfected quantum detection sensors, even a stealth aircraft would be detected.

The next message was even more terrifying: “You have 48 hours to surrender. If we do not see our flag raised over your capital by sundown the third of April, the next spray will target and kill every person in the country



who has ever had their DNA sequenced.”

The enemy was merciless. Almost 20 percent of the population had their DNA sequenced, and most were in the age group that could fight. Lee knew the next two days would be awful. Instead of giving control of the airwaves back to the government, the enemy played their national anthem and repeated their messages over and over. In all likelihood, everyone shut off their TVs.

Lee spent the second day inside. When night came, he made his way from his small suburban home to a bombed-out building near the capital. It took him almost eight hours to travel the four miles without detection. There were fewer drones at night.

Once inside the building, he moved to the highest floor, where he could see the capital.

He needed to see the city and observe the enemy. He knew the country had lost its primary ability to resist, but he didn’t believe they were defeated. They still had a navy, which should have avoided the first strike and would coordinate with the government to exist.

The invaders had destroyed every airfield in the country. While that kept airplanes from taking off, it also meant they would struggle getting reinforcements into the city. In his mind, Lee thought of the battles in the Middle East, where insurgents caused conventional soldiers trouble for years. Some might even argue the insurgents won.

Now, his own population would become the insurgency, and when the sailors arrived, he would help organize them and the citizens into a resistance.

When Lee woke the next morning he foraged for food. He hadn’t eaten in 48 hours, and he was hungry. Today was the deadline for the government to respond. He knew they could still fight. He was trained to never accept defeat, and he would resist until the end. He just hoped the government would not succumb to the invader’s demands. No foreign flag

would fly over their capital.

He eventually found a pantry with some canned food, which he devoured in minutes. Lee didn't realize how hungry he was. Once his makeshift meal was complete, he began to look for other useful supplies.

Around noon, he found an old battery-powered pocket TV. Old tech, but reliable. When he finally dialed in a picture, what he saw was devastating. Pictures of submersible aircraft carriers were in every port in the country. Lee had never seen a submersible aircraft carrier, but it was huge. Worse, it looked as though three or four were hooked together to form massive floating airports.

In that instant, it became clear the invaders destroyed all the airfields and airstrips because they didn't need them. They had floating airstrips hidden in the ocean. In the distance, behind one of the submersible carriers, Lee saw the smoking hull of one of their aircraft carriers. Its tattered flag still waved in the wind. Likely, the entire navy was destroyed and the harbor was now patrolled by loitering A.I.-equipped munitions or some form of submersible drone. The enemy left no box unchecked.

By evening, it was almost three days since the blink. In that short time, the entire country had been subdued, and its ability to resist was not just demolished, it was disintegrated. Lee believed the government still functioned, but was probably much like that flag on the aircraft carrier he saw earlier, tattered and frayed.

The deadline to comply was near, but the sunset was beautiful. Lee reflected on his warnings to his superiors, the development of magical technology, and America's war history as he watched a hideous flag with 50 stars on a blue background and 13 red and white stripes hoisted above Beijing's capital.



### Author's Note

I hope you enjoyed the story, but I must mention that its purpose is not to paint the U.S. as the bad guy (although I will tell you that our near-peer competitors see us in that light).

If we are to truly commit to preparing for large-scale combat operations in a world of near peers, against an enemy with a more advanced military than our own, we must see ourselves through their eyes.

The U.S. has a history of war spanning more than 220 years, and it terrifies many of our enemies. This is important to understand, because terrified foes will take drastic measures to defend themselves. To be ready, we must see ourselves as they see us and prepare as they will prepare. This paradox is the only way to peace.

In 2001, John Mearsheimer published a book titled "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics," in which he explains this paradox as the theory of offensive realism. I believe every leader in the Army must study and understand this theory. ■

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### References

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