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STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE
US ARMY WAR COLLEGE
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

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**FACTORS INFLUENCING PERCEPTIONS OF
THE US/USSR MILITARY BALANCE**

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6 FACTORS INFLUENCING PERCEPTIONS
OF THE US/USSR MILITARY BALANCE.

by

10 Robert S. Nichols

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FOREWORD

✓ This memorandum is based on the premise that nations base their policies on their perceptions of the US/USSR military balance and do not make their decisions solely or even primarily on the basis of the objective data concerning this balance. The author discusses various methods which, if employed to diminish perceptual distortions, would allow more objective and accurate judgement of the balance. He concludes that if these perceptions are dealt with and their nature understood, the chances of being misled by our own perceptions can be reduced and sometimes the perceptions which other countries have of the US/USSR balance can be modified.

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This memorandum was prepared as a contribution to the field of national security research and study. As such, it does not reflect the official view of the College, the Department of the Army, or the Department of Defense.

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Robert G. Yerks
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Major General, USA
Commandant

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

COLONEL ROBERT S. NICHOLS has been assigned to the US Army War College since 1973, serving as Director of Human Resources Development and as Director of Curriculum Research, Directorate of Academic Affairs, and currently as Director of American Studies, Department of Corresponding Studies. He was trained as an infantry officer but his military career has been spent providing psychological services, training psychologists and administering psychological programs. He has a PhD in clinical psychology from the University of Rochester and a post-doctoral master's degree in community mental health from Harvard. He is a graduate of the US Army Command and General Staff College and the US Army War College.

FACTORS INFLUENCING PERCEPTIONS OF THE US/USSR MILITARY BALANCE

This memorandum will not review the *objective data* which underlie most assessments of the US/USSR military balance. These data are very important, but they have been thoroughly reviewed by other knowledgeable writers. Instead, this paper will discuss the factors which affect the *perceptions* people have of the Soviet/American balance of forces. This topic has been selected for three reasons:

- The behavior of the United States, Russia, their allies, and other countries is determined by their *perceptions* of the American/Soviet balance, rather than by the *objective nature* of this balance. This is true because each country bases its decisions based on what it *perceives* this balance to be. Therefore, it is important to know how different observers perceive this balance, and what degree of inaccuracy or *distortion* is present in their perceptions.
- There are some well understood psychological principles which explain how these perceptions are formed. These principles can be used to detect, correct, and prevent possible errors in these perceptions.
- These same principles can also serve as a useful guide when the United States (or any other country) seeks to change the perceptions which we and others have of the US/USSR military balance.

In discussing this topic, several kinds of information will be presented, including some relevant principles of perception; some examples of how these principles operate in current evaluations of the US/USSR balance; some steps that might be taken to reduce the distortions and disagreements that exist among present US perceptions of the US/USSR balance; and, actions that might be carried out to change the perceptions which various nations have of the US/USSR balance.

It is recognized that some readers may object to this focus on perception. They will argue that what are really important are the objective data: how many missiles each side has, how many submarines, etc. To this objection, two responses can be made.

First, it must be granted that the objective data are essential to have. They play a key role in determining perceptions, and must be considered by each nation as one factor in shaping its own defense plans and forces. At the same time, however, it must be recognized that there is no consensus as to what these objective data are, and what they signify. Different observers, using the same data, come to different conclusions. It is partly because these different perceptions exist that this article discusses possible explanations for these differences, and ways of *minimizing* them.

Second, it is important to note that military forces have two kinds of effects: physical and psychological, and both are important. In wartime, military forces kill or wound people, destroy equipment and facilities, and make regions uninhabitable. In addition to these physical effects, however, these forces also achieve psychological effects. They change people's perceptions and emotions. They make people afraid, or discouraged, or ambitious. They can deceive people or intimidate them, or destroy their will to fight. They can do this just by their existence and deployment, even when they are not used in actual combat. Quite often these psychological effects are more powerful than the physical effects which the forces achieve.

In peacetime, of course, these psychological effects of military force are predominant. Even though forces are no longer engaged in combat, their very existence and deployment serve as forms of communication. That is, these forces can be used to create perceptions among friends, foes, and neutral countries that may lead them to behave in the ways we want.

For example, when we deploy troops to Europe, and equip them with conventional and tactical nuclear weapons, we are trying to deter

Soviet aggression. We do so by creating a perception among the Russians that we can and will defend ourselves, and will retaliate against them if they attack us. Similarly, when we form alliances, or give military equipment to other nations, we are trying to create a perception on their part that we are capable and dependable allies.

In summary, then, *perceptions* are very important when we evaluate the balance of military forces because these forces often accomplish their purposes by altering the perceptions of the observers who make the evaluations.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE PERCEPTIONS OF THE US/USSR MILITARY BALANCE

In the paragraphs that follow, various perceptual principles are stated, and current examples of these principles are given. The *principles* can be found in any basic psychology textbook—such as that of Berelson.¹ Their exact phrasing has been modified to fit the military nature of this article. The *examples* which have been chosen are also military in nature, but many other political, economic, social and psychological illustrations of the same principles could be, and have been, given.

Principle One. Any perception is based partly on the external stimuli or situation that is being observed and partly on the viewpoint of the observer. As a result, the same situation may be perceived differently by different observers.

Example: The Russians claim the Backfire is not a strategic weapon. The United States claims that it is.

Principle Two. When a situation is simple and clearcut, most observers will see it the same way and there will be little room for perceptual distortion to occur. On the other hand, if the situation is vague and complex there is much more opportunity for the biases of the observers to become the primary factors governing their perceptions. This in turn will produce greater variability among the perceptions.

Example: There is fairly good agreement about how many strategic missiles the United States and USSR have, since this information can be assessed fairly accurately by national technical means. On the other hand, the concept of "strategic superiority" is a highly complex variable, about which observers disagree. Major General Keegan² claims the United States is strategically inferior. Dr. Scoville uses the same data to conclude the United States is superior.³

Principle Three. When a situation is very complex, observers will try to simplify it by focusing on a few key variables and leaving out the rest. They do this because it is very difficult to properly evaluate all the relevant variables.

Example: Discussions of the US/USSR strategic balance, particularly among the general public, are often limited to a few variables such as number of missiles or number of re-entry vehicles. Other relevant variables such as system reliability, command and control, likelihood of use, etc. are often left out of the evaluation.

Principle Four. Any perception is a Gestalt, or pattern, which depends on a number of ingredients and their relation to each other. Frequently no single ingredient plays an exclusive role in shaping the perception.

Example: The relative military power of the United States and USSR may be declared "roughly equivalent" but this balance takes multiple factors into account: number and types of weapons; their quality; the effectiveness with which they can be used; the probable likelihood of their being used, etc. No single variable is predominant in determining the balance.

Principle Five. In some cases, when a situation is a complex one the biases of the observer will lead him to focus on one particular aspect of the situation, and his use of this factor will affect his perception of the total situation.

Example: An observer who places particular importance on the power and shock value of armored forces may give this factor excessive weight in evaluating the relative capacity of US and USSR conventional forces. This may lead him to overvalue the strength of USSR forces by causing him to neglect other factors in which US forces are superior.

Principle Six. Discrepancies in perception may also occur because of the ideological biases of the perceiver. That is, people who are presented with a vague or complex situation tend to see what they want to see, or are accustomed to seeing.

Example: Colonel Heint and Lieutenant General Eaker consistently manifest a high degree of suspiciousness in evaluating Russian intentions, and tend to portray Russian capabilities as being very great. On the other hand, Dr. Scoville and Dr. York tend to be more sanguine about Russian intentions and more inclined to stress our technological superiorities over the Russians.⁴

Principle Seven. In any situation that includes a blend of ingredients, some of which are measurable and others of which are not measurable,

some people place more emphasis on, and are more impressed by, the measurable ingredients. Others pay more attention to the imprecise ingredients. In the latter event, there is more apt to be disagreement about the perception since the unmeasurable variables are more subject to selective perception.

Example: If we evaluate the number and type of US and Soviet ships, there is reasonable consensus about the results. However, if we evaluate the state of training and readiness of the US and USSR navies, there is much less agreement among observers. Those observers who judge the two navies only in terms of their ship strength may agree fairly well but other observers who judge the overall capabilities of the two navies, including not only their equipment but also other factors such as leadership training and readiness, are much less likely to agree.

Principle Eight. Discrepancies among perceivers also occur because different people use different standards in evaluating the same situation.

Example: We have a choice between buying more conventional artillery, or developing CLGP's. We may believe we get greater kill effectiveness per dollar by developing CLGP's, so we choose that option. On the other hand, the Russians may believe that conventional artillery is more effective, and thus conclude that our failure to develop more and better conventional artillery indicates poor capability or lack of will on our part.

Principle Nine. When we evaluate something, our standard of measurement is very often relative rather than absolute. That is, something is not strong, or weak, or reliable except in reference to some standard. If such a standard does not exist, then we are reduced to very imprecise comparisons such as stating that one weapons system requires less training, or is more dependable, than another one. Such comparisons are very risky if we do not have some agreed-upon yardstick of "training requirement" or "dependability." Unfortunately, often the only yardstick we have is "experienced judgment" and, not infrequently, "experienced judges" differ in their conclusions.

Example: The accuracy of Russian and US missiles can be compared in terms of their circular error, probable. However, overall judgments of missile usefulness depend not only on how close the missiles come to achieving some desired level of accuracy but also on whether or not they are capable of achieving a desired effect such as mutually assured destruction. This latter judgment is much more vague and imprecise since there is no agreed-upon standard of what constitutes "mutually assured destruction."

Principle Ten. We are more apt to perceive a change in something than we are to notice a constant, unchanging condition.

Example: The average citizen may take little notice of the prevailing Russian superiority in tanks, or US superiority in missile accuracy, until some striking change in that relative balance calls it to his attention.

Principle Eleven. Once a new situation has developed and endured for a time, we grow accustomed to it and are less concerned about it.

Example: The erection of the Berlin Wall created anger and fear when it was first done but it is now accepted as a *fait accompli*. Similarly, the strategic advantages the United States enjoys because of its "forward-basing" policy and options are often taken for granted until some event, such as the Russian attempt to achieve forward missile basing in Cuba, calls dramatic attention to the potential shift in balance that the Russian presence caused.

Principle Twelve. Once we reach an evaluation of something, we tend to stick with that evaluation, unless something quite drastic forces us to change. We become resistant to new evidence that might compel us to change.

Example: Many people have long accepted the comforting assurance that the technological superiority of the United States compensates for the numerical superiority of the Russians. There is evidence that we are losing this technological superiority in crucial areas, but there is great reluctance to accept this evidence. This is partly because of our longstanding conviction of general US technological superiority in all areas of both military and civilian life.

Principle Thirteen. People are consistent in their perceptions not only because of their constant personal biases but also because their peers and the institutions in which they work put pressure on them to conform to group and institutional biases. Accordingly, when intelligence agencies, "think tanks," and national populations evaluate the US/USSR balance, they and their members tend to adopt consistent, unchanging positions once they have made an initial evaluation.

Example: It is often possible to predict the conclusions which will be reached by Admiral Le Rocque's Center for Defense Information or by the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research when they evaluate the US/USSR balance since both agencies show fairly high consistency in their respective points of view. Some other agencies also show consistent biases.⁵

Principle Fourteen. If we want to understand how people will

perceive a situation, we must understand *their* frame of reference, since that determines their perception. It is a frequent and very severe error to assume others will judge things as we do.

Example: We often hear people say, "Russia already has more weapons than it needs for its own defense. Hence the surplus indicates offensive intent on its part." This is not necessarily true. Russians may believe, in all sincerity, that all the weapons they now have, and the added ones which they want, are genuinely needed for defensive purposes. If we want to determine their intent, it is risky to use their level of armaments as a sign of aggressive intent since they may have acquired these weapons for reasons they consider defensive in nature.

METHODS OF IMPROVING US EVALUATIONS OF THE US/USSR BALANCE

For the reasons cited above, it is very unlikely that general agreement can be reached about the US/USSR balance. Different evaluators are likely to reach different conclusions. However, it is probably possible to reduce the range of disagreement by making certain procedural changes in the way we make the assessments. Among the desirable changes are the following, some of which have already been initiated:

- We should define very precisely the methods we use to make the evaluations, and the standards we use in making comparisons, so that others can use the same procedures. People who cannot agree on the yardsticks to be used are unlikely to agree on the final measurements.
- We must be sure to include all the relevant variables when we assess US or USSR strengths. In particular, we must include those variables which are "soft" and hard to quantify such as morale, training, command and control, and overall unit and weapons systems effectiveness. Whenever possible we should attempt to quantify these soft variables, even if only by using some rough rating scale ranging from "good" to "bad." If this is done, there is less risk of overlooking key variables and the resulting judgments are apt to be at least somewhat more precise.
- We should study US/USSR strengths over a period of time, to determine trends and changes. It is most misleading to depend on "snapshots" taken at a single time.
- In assessing the balance, it is essential to assess intentions as well as capabilities. We must study not only the strengths of US/USSR forces

but also the probable methods and locations of their employment. For example, Russian divisions located near the Chinese border may not be available for quick offensive employment elsewhere because this may be against Russian policy for use of these forces.

- We must make deliberate attempts to reduce the effects of observer bias. This can be done in a number of ways:

- We can avoid using the same observers for too long a period of time. This reduces the risk that occurs when observers develop a bias towards consistency and ignore new data that might require them to change their views.

- Whenever an evaluator makes a new, or deviant evaluation that differs from the accepted wisdom, he should be encouraged to develop his evaluation in detail and his findings should be disseminated to other evaluators. Deviant evaluations should be welcomed, not discouraged. They should be carefully evaluated. Dissident evaluations and minority opinions should always be included along with the majority report. No attempt should be made to compel group consensus if it does not exist.

- We should ask all observers to specify in advance the biases they think they have. This has two advantages. First, it increases the likelihood that the observer will be aware of, and make allowance for, his biases. Second, it allows the person who uses that observer's conclusions to make some allowance for the observer's bias. We already do this when we evaluate the conclusions of observers whose biases are known from previous experience with them.

- We should seek evaluations from individual observers, operating independently, who are known to have differing biases. We should also seek evaluations from panels whose members have a range of biases. This allows us to compare individual against group conclusions, in order to allow for group or organizational biases.

- At any given time, we should ensure that group evaluations are done by panels whose members are known to vary considerably in their basic attitudes towards the evaluation. Panels made up of like-minded experts are very apt to produce biased results.

- We should make a regular practice of using outside evaluators who are not permanent employees of the agencies making the evaluation. This reduces the risk that these evaluators will conform to the institutional biases of the agencies that obtain their views.

- We should ensure that key issues are evaluated by several groups that operate independently of each other, so their final conclusions can be compared for consistencies or contradictions.

- We should develop and disseminate as much information as possible concerning the US/USSR military balance. This has two main advantages. First, it means that lay people making judgments on the subject will have a broader range of information, which will tend to reduce the risk of distortion. Second, if a greater number of people, with a wider variety of perspectives, have access to this information, we are more likely to get a broader range of evaluations. If, under these new conditions, we still find good consensus among observers, it is less apt to be a false consensus than one that has developed only among a small group of experts who are "in the know."

- Because of the obvious biases and self-interest that the United States and USSR have when evaluating the US/USSR balance, we should also make every effort to develop and support international organizations and private third-party agencies whose mission is to evaluate this balance. Such agencies should be staffed by citizens from countries other than the US/USSR and should be given maximum feasible information.

SOVIET EVALUATIONS OF THE US/USSR BALANCE

So far this paper has mostly discussed the biases that exist when US groups judge the US/USSR balance, and ways that these biases can partly be overcome. It should be pointed out, of course, that it would be greatly to Russia's advantage if her leaders took similar steps to reduce perceptual errors in the estimates they make. For all we know, perhaps they do this, although the nature of their ideology and their rigid political and economic system makes this seem a bit unlikely. In any case, it would be to their advantage, as well as ours, if they also tried to improve their evaluation procedures.

POSSIBLE METHODS OF CHANGING THIRD COUNTRY PERCEPTIONS OF THE US/USSR BALANCE

Up to this point, the emphasis has been on those factors which distort perceptions, and the ways this distortion can be reduced. In making these analyses, some principles of perception have been presented which also can be used in another way to help us deliberately modify the perceptions which other countries have of the US/USSR balance. The possible methods of doing this are numerous, and can only be mentioned briefly in this paper. A few examples may suffice.

Each country judges the US/USSR balance in relation to its own needs and interests. For example, black African regimes are often more

interested in support for their quarrels with "illegitimate white regimes" than they are in opposition to communism. Accordingly, they may judge the US/USSR balance in terms of which nation is more able and willing to provide conventional military assistance to their governments. If we are willing to do this, we may accomplish more to change their perceptions of us than we can by an enlargement of our strategic forces.

Countries also judge our military power in terms of the kinds of force they think is most important. A maritime nation like Japan may be more concerned with our naval forces, while Thailand may care more about our ability to help them in their internal defense and development programs. On the other hand, a richer nation like Iran may care more about our sophisticated weaponry. This means that with each country we must use, and emphasize, those aspects of our power that are most meaningful to that particular country.

As another example, we must recognize that some countries evaluate the US/USSR military balance primarily in terms of the conventional forces which the United States and USSR possess because they believe neither superpower would be likely to use its nuclear forces.

We must also recognize that some countries may be more impressed by our willingness not to use our power than by our use of it. For example, there were some countries which felt that our use of aerial bombing during the Vietnam War was a sign of weakness, not strength. They believed it indicated a desire to substitute high technology warfare for the more difficult, but perhaps more appropriate, use of Army-oriented internal defense and development programs.

Another effect of the negative evaluation which some countries place on the US use of technology can be found in the decision not to sell CBU's to Israel. In this instance, it appears to have been decided that giving Israel such a powerful weapon could be counterproductive in terms of the way that use of such a weapon would be perceived by other countries.

One final principle can be offered. A number of nations judge our military forces as a sign of our national intentions as well as our national capability. Accordingly, if we reduce our forces or bring more of them back to CONUS, or fail to use them in a situation where they might have been helpful, such as Angola, some nations may perceive this as an indication of changed American intentions. If American power is seen as the product of American capabilities and American intentions [Power = f (Capability x Intention)] then in a given situation

other nations may conclude that American capabilities have been reduced or modified by our changing intentions. Then they may conclude that our net power to act in that situation has diminished.

SUMMARY

This paper argues that we should pay more attention to the *perceptions* which exist concerning the US/USSR military balance, because nations base their policies on their perceptions of this balance rather than on the *objective data*. These perceptions, of course, are related to and influenced by the objective data but they are also influenced by many other factors. We know something about these influences which can modify perceptions, and by using this knowledge we can reduce the extent of these *perceptual distortions*. We can also use these *principles of perception to make efforts to change* the perceptions which others have concerning the US/USSR balance.

The paper describes and explains a number of the principles of perception which are relevant to our perceptions of the US/USSR balance, and it discusses the kinds of perceptual changes that result from the operation of these principles. In addition, it discusses some methods that can be used to diminish these perceptual distortions, so that we can judge the US/USSR military balance more objectively and accurately.

The paper also gives some examples of ways in which we could make use of the principles of perception in order to modify the views which third countries have of the US/USSR balance.

One final issue which is addressed is the question of whether it is wise to focus on perceptions, rather than on the *objective data*. It is argued that we must address these perceptions because we can never fully and completely evaluate the objective data. Instead, what we actually deal with are varying *perceptions* of these objective data, and it is these perceptions which form the bases for our actions. Hence, it is essential that we deal with, and understand the nature of, these perceptions. If we do so, we can reduce the chance of being misled by our own perceptions, and we can sometimes modify the perceptions which other countries have of the US/USSR balance.

ENDNOTES

1. Berelson and G. Steiner, *Human Behavior*, Shorter Edition, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967.

2. Major General George J. Keegan, "We're Outnumbered, Outproduced," *Baltimore Sun*, February 13, 1977, p. K1.

3. Herbert Scoville, Jr., "There is No Question the U.S. is Superior," *Baltimore Sun*, February 13, 1977, p. K1.

4. Colonel Robert D. Heintz, Jr. is a retired Marine officer who serves as the military correspondent for the *Detroit News*. He writes a column which is syndicated by the North American Newspaper Alliance. His views appear frequently in *Seapower*, the journal of the Navy League of the United States. He is quite conservative and expresses great concern about Soviet intentions and capabilities in comparison to those of the United States. Two quotes will illustrate his views concerning Soviet intentions: (1) "He [President Carter] also knows that Russia has never abstained or pulled back from the development of any major weapons systems during its unswerving march for world military superiority" (*Seapower*, May 1977, page 30); (2) "Russia is now driving towards across-the-board military and warfighting superiority over the U.S." This second quotation indicates Colonel Heintz's evaluation of the National Intelligence Estimate concerning Soviet intentions, and is taken from his article in *Seapower* (February 1977, page 34). In this same article, he refers to Dr. Herbert Scoville as "a skeptic" (concerning Soviet intentions) and "a leading advocate of U.S. nuclear disarmament." American will is evaluated by Colonel Heintz as being as "flabby as spaghetti" (*Seapower*, May 1977, p. 29).

Lieutenant General Ira Eaker is a retired Air Force officer whose views are reported regularly on the editorial pages of the *Air Force Times*. His general political perspective is indicated by this quotation, taken from the December 12, 1977 issue of the *Times*: "Can anyone doubt that our international policy of detente is shoring up communism? Can anyone doubt that the U.S. is drifting, inevitably, into a welfare, communist state?" Concerning Soviet capabilities he reports "Soviet superiority in military forces makes possible, for the first time, this imprisonment of tens of millions of human beings. Similarly, superiority in nuclear weapons and the announced will to use them provide the Soviet Union with a coercive capability which can bring all mankind under this yoke of extortion and slavery" (*Air Force Times*, November 14, 1977). General Eaker also speaks of Soviet intentions by describing "Russia's determined effort to dominate the world" (*Air Force Times*, August 8, 1977).

A quite different perspective is provided by Drs. Herbert Scoville, Jr. and Herbert York. Dr. Scoville was formerly deputy director of the CIA, and assistant director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. He currently serves on the Board of Advisors for the Center for Defense Information. Dr. Scoville generally favors a slowing down of the arms race and he is very cautious in his evaluation of Soviet capabilities. Concerning US policy he argues "As long as we [the United States] maintain a survivable deterrent regardless of Soviet buildups—and this is true today and for the foreseeable future [emphasis added by present author]—then we must not allow ourselves to be stampeded by remote contingencies" (Herbert Scoville, "The Soviet Threat: Is There a Present Danger,"

The Defense Monitor, February 1977, pp. 1-3). He adds, in the same article, that there is "an absence of convincing evidence of accelerated Soviet programs for strategic offensive weapons."

In other articles, Dr. Scoville has expressed similar viewpoints. He favors lower levels of strategic weapons for both the United States and the USSR (*Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1975, Section 10, page 1) and urges a stronger, more comprehensive test ban (*The New York Times*, April 18, 1976, Section 4, page 14).

Dr. York is a former Deputy Director of Defense for Research and Engineering. He is particularly concerned about the risks of nuclear proliferation and nuclear war and frequently writes on these and related topics in such publications as the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. He is relatively comfortable with the relative US/USSR strategic balance but very uncomfortable with the high levels of nuclear weaponry on both sides. He argues "I believe the current nuclear balance has been stable for some time and that the SALT I agreements go a long way toward assuring that it will remain stable for the foreseeable future" (*Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 1974, page 5). In a more recent article (*Los Angeles Times*, February 29, 1976, Section IV, p. 4) he argues for much stronger curbs on nuclear proliferation.

The point here is not that one viewpoint is more correct than the others, but rather that competent authorities, coming from a variety of backgrounds, have very different perspectives and evaluate the same situations quite differently.

5. The Center for Defense Information, of which Rear Admiral (Ret) Gene R. LaRocque is director, tends to adopt rather liberal perspectives on defense issues, while the American Enterprise Institute is more apt to judge matters from a conservative point of view. The conservative perspective of the American Enterprise Institute has been commented upon in two recent articles: "Is America Turning Right," (*Newsweek*, November 7, 1977, pp. 34-44); and "The Conservative's Think Tank," (*Business Week*, May 2, 1977, pp. 80-81).

By contrast, there is general agreement that the Center for Defense Information is more liberal, although there is considerable controversy as to just how liberal it is. Rowland Evans and Robert Novak referred to the Center as "anti-Pentagon" and to its director as "dovish" in an article in *The Washington Post*, (August 11, 1975, page A19). Admiral LaRocque responded to these charges in *The Washington Post* on August 25, 1975 (page A21) but Evans and Novak returned to the attack in another column ("The Running Mate Problem," *The Washington Post*, September 7, 1975, page B7), in which they charged that the Center's publication, *The Defense Monitor*, "carries on a continuous propaganda campaign against defense spending."

The Defense Monitor itself gives evidence that the Center views the US/USSR military balance more optimistically than others might. In the issue of December 1974, it reports "U.S. military power continues to be more than sufficient and is not being significantly overtaken by the Soviet Union." A similar conclusion is stated in the issue of May 1976, when an article entitled "The Artificial Crisis of American Security" reports "There is no real crisis of American security, nor has the case been made that the United States is falling further behind the Soviet Union militarily."

Here again, the point is not so much that one agency is more correct than the other but rather that agencies, like people, can have consistent biases which lead them to interpret situations very differently.

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19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) US/USSR military balance; military capabilities; military perceptions; intelligence estimate procedures.		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Nations base their policies on their perceptions of the US/USSR mili- tary balance rather than on objective data. For this reason, more atten- tion should be given to these perceptions, which are related to and influenced by the objective data, but are also influenced by many other factors. Some- thing is known about the influences which can modify perceptions, and by using this knowledge the extent of perceptual distortions can be reduced. These principles of perception additionally can be used to attempt to change the perceptions of others concerning the US/USSR balance.		

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A number of principles of perception are relevant to our perceptions of the US/USSR balance; different kinds of perceptual changes result from the operations of these principles. Various methods are discussed which, if employed to diminish these perceptual distortions, would allow more objective and accurate judgement of the US/USSR military balance. Examples of ways in which the principles of perception could be used to modify the views which third world countries have of the US/USSR balance are also given.

Finally, the question of whether it is wise to focus on perceptions, rather than on the objective data, is raised. These perceptions must be addressed because full and complete evaluation of objective data is impossible. Instead, we actually deal with varying perceptions of the objective data, and these perceptions form the bases for our actions. Hence, it is essential that these perceptions be dealt with and their nature understood. By doing so, the chance of being misled by our own perceptions can be reduced and sometimes the perceptions which other countries have of the US/USSR balance can be modified.

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