Malign analysts
or evil empire?:
Western images of
Soviet nuclear strategy

Exasperated Kremlinologists are overly fond of citing Winston Churchill's description of the Soviet Union as a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. Their unspoken but shared assumption is that puzzle, riddle, and enigma are of Soviet origin. It is certainly true that the authoritarian nature of the Soviet state, its peculiar blend of foreign ideology and native Russian tradition together with its irritating and pervasive concern for secrecy, makes it a difficult subject of study. Western students of Soviet affairs ought nevertheless to accept their fair share of the blame for the confusion that surrounds our understanding of the Soviet Union.

Since the Bolshevik Revolution, many Westerners have approached the study of the Soviet Union with strongly held and even rigid preconceptions about the country and the Communist party which governs it. Whether they saw the Soviet Union as the harbinger of a secular paradise or the incarnation of all evil, Western writers found no difficulty in gathering abundant 'evidence' in support of their preferred interpretation. The sophisticated analyses of Soviet affairs which have been available for quite some time – produced in the 1940s and 1950s by the likes of George Kennan, Harrison Salisbury, and Merle Fainsod – have not prevented the post-World War...
II public debate from being dominated by more simplistic conceptions.

Strategic analysis has fared no better. Its practitioners have been active participants in domestic debates over defence policy and have advanced interpretations of Soviet strategic doctrine and force structure that are supportive of their policy preferences. Advocates of arms control and détente have generally portrayed Soviet doctrine and force structure as defensively motivated. They explain the Soviet Union's emphasis on military power in terms of the country's vulnerabilities and its leaders' fears. Soviet military might is intended to protect the Soviet Union against its restive nationalities, hostile neighbours, and bellicose rivals. As Gary Guertner puts it: 'The question, then, is whether the Soviets see nuclear war-fighting capabilities as credible instruments of policy ... that might facilitate the achievement of specific and well-defined global objectives, or whether their emphasis on war-fighting is a reaction to anticipated future aggression against the U.S.S.R. Clearly, in the Soviet strategic mind-set, the latter is the case.'

Analysts opposed to arms control and supportive of the arms build-up by the Reagan administration in the United States have argued that Soviet strategy is offensively motivated. They insist that Soviet leaders are driven not by insecurity, but by ambition. In contrast to defensive analysts who emphasize the numerous invasions of Russia and the insecurities these have bred, the 'offensive' school points to the equally long history of Russian expansionism in support of its contention that the principal purpose of Moscow's foreign policy is to extend Soviet territorial and ideological influence. Some identify communism as the source of Soviet aggressiveness. All agree that Soviet conventional forces, indisputably geared for the offensive, and strategic forces, with their impressive counterforce capability, are clear evidence of aggressive intentions. Colin Gray, one of the

most prominent advocates of this interpretation, asserts that 'the Soviet drive for more and more military power is, in good part, a drive for influence for its own sake. Quite aside from the "rational" considerations of enhanced security, Soviet leaders enjoy the exercise of power.'

Differences of opinion about Soviet intentions constitute the fundamental cleavage in the field of Soviet studies. But the defensive and offensive interpretations of Soviet strategy are still best described as general orientations, not formal schools of thought. It is also true that a growing number of Soviet specialists are eclectic, invoking a mix of defensive and offensive explanations to explain Soviet foreign policy. Most analyses of Soviet strategy nevertheless cluster about one of the two extremes. For this reason the defensive and offensive approaches remain meaningful analytical categories.

Both orientations indulge in oversimplification, but analysts who depict the Soviet Union as fundamentally aggressive are currently more prone to this failing. This may arise from the greater caution now displayed by many defensive analysts in the aftermath of the exposure of some of their previous explanations of Soviet strategy as so wide of the mark. The most striking example was the attempt by some prominent military writers in the 1960s and early 1970s to put a benign interpretation on Moscow's rejection of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) and insistence that socialism would emerge triumphant in any nuclear war. They described Soviet doctrine as primitive and uninformed and attributed this to Soviet inexperience with nuclear weapons and the country's lack of civilian strategists.

In 1963, the noted military authority, R.H. Liddell-Hart, commented about Marshal Sokolovskiy's *Military Strategy*: 'the manifest deficiencies shown in this and other published Soviet military writings are due not to any attempts at "esoteric communication" or to a deliberate concealment of the writer's real process of thinking, but mainly to backward tendencies in Soviet military thought – combined with the illusions that a long course of mental conditioning tends to produce, especially in those who have lived for a long time in a state of relative isolation.'

With noticeable arrogance, many Western political leaders and strategists looked forward to arms control negotiations as a way of educating Soviet political and military leaders to the realities of a nuclear world and to the inescapable 'fact' of MAD. They assumed that in due course the Soviet Union would come around to the American point of view. In 1970, Roman Kolkowicz estimated that 'Soviet strategic doctrine and capabilities lagged behind the United States by about five years.'

Over four decades of nuclear experience and two decades of arms control negotiations have not convinced the Soviet Union of the correctness of the American approach to nuclear weapons. There has been more learning in the other direction; under Carter and Reagan, the United States moved closer to the Soviet point of view by rejecting MAD in favour of a war-fighting strategy closely modelled on Moscow's. Until the Gorbachev era, the Soviet Union did not begin to think about changing its strategic doctrine, although it too began to proclaim the futility of nuclear war. This embarrassing turn of events forced strategic analysts who emphasize the defensive goals of Soviet strategy to rethink the origins of Soviet doctrine and force structure. In the course of doing this they were compelled to look inside the

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7 Roman Kolkowicz, 'Strategic elites and politics of superpower,' *Journal of International Affairs* 26(spring-summer 1972), 40-59.
‘black box’ of policy-making. This led to a number of interesting hypotheses about the organizational and ideological determinants of doctrine, the ways in which it has been influenced by successive leadership struggles, and the broader foreign policy concerns of the Soviet elite. Research of this kind has greatly enriched Western understanding of the Soviet Union. It has also encouraged the emergence of the notion that the Soviet Union is a distinct strategic culture whose force structure and doctrine cannot be understood in terms of American strategic concepts or ways of thinking.

The greater sophistication of the arguments put forward in support of the defensive orientation may lie in its status as a minority point of view. Its adherents face an uphill struggle in trying to demonstrate how developments that are more widely viewed as aggressive are actually consistent with their interpretation. This often requires them to look beneath the surface and invoke organizational, bureaucratic, and domestic political explanations for strategic phenomena. A case in point is the impressive Soviet land-based missile counterforce capability which partisans of the evil school offer as prima facie evidence of Soviet aggressiveness. More benign interpretations have explained this feature of Soviet force structure in terms of technical limitations, the parochial interests of missile design bureaux, and the political process by which weapons decisions are made.


THE ASCENDANCY OF THE OFFENSIVE SCHOOL

These two approaches to Soviet strategy have vied for supremacy ever since the 1930s. During the past decade, the aggressive interpretation once again came to dominate the thinking of government officials and the public at large. The several reasons for this offer some insight into the peculiar nature of strategic assessment.

The resurgence of the aggressive interpretation can be understood, in the first instance, as an overreaction to the failure of earlier, unrealistic, but widely shared expectations about the development of Soviet doctrine and force structure. The defensive interpretation of strategy predicted that Soviet doctrine would move towards acceptance of MAD as the Soviet Union gained more experience with nuclear weapons. Instead, the Soviet Union continued to espouse its war-fighting doctrine and steadfastly denied that a situation of mutual vulnerability could ever be in its interest. Many American strategic analysts had also predicted that the Soviet strategic forces would come to resemble their American counterparts, structured at the time for retaliation against their adversary’s population and economic assets. But in keeping with its war-fighting doctrine, the Soviet Union sought to develop, and ultimately attained, an impressive counterforce capability. Many Western analysts, convinced of the irrationality of any strategic concept other than MAD, were at first unwilling to take Soviet doctrine seriously and ignored the implications for force structure that flowed from it. Colin Gray himself admits: 'When the true dimensions of Soviet counterforce ambitions became clear they were easily misinterpreted as signals of aggressive intent.' This interpretation seemed all the more convincing as the emerging counterforce capability remained coupled to an apparently otherwise inexplicable war-fighting doctrine.

If Western analysts only belatedly recognized the counter-

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force goal of Soviet force structure, they also tended to exaggerate the extent to which the Soviet Union actually attained a counterforce capability. In part, this exaggeration was deliberately fostered by those who stood to profit from a more aggressive portrayal of the Soviet Union. The air force, the think tanks it supported, and ideological opponents of the Soviet Union made grossly inflated claims about Soviet strategic capabilities. Institutions which had earlier played down, or misinterpreted, Soviet strategic capabilities or programmes now sought to regain credibility. The infamous Team A-Team B controversy at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is illustrative.

During the Ford administration, the CIA was repeatedly accused by influential hardliners – Melvin Laird, John Connally, and John Foster among them – of underestimating Soviet strategic capabilities. In response, the agency agreed in the spring of 1976 to test its estimates by allowing an outside group to prepare an assessment based on the agency’s data. Team A, the official CIA group, was led by Howard Stoertz, who in the past had been responsible for some of the estimates that had been challenged. Team B was chaired by Richard Pipes of Harvard and included General Daniel Graham and Paul Nitze – all three prominent representatives of the ‘evil school’ of Soviet strategy.11 To nobody’s surprise, Team B reported that the Soviet Union was on the verge of developing a first-strike capability. They also emphasized the effectiveness of Soviet civil defence efforts, previously belittled by Team A. Team B’s report had the effect of moving the official CIA estimate some way towards the hardline position, making the National Intelligence Esti-

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mated of Soviet Strategic Capabilities 'much grimmer reading than it had been for many a year.' The shift was entirely the result of politics as no new information was made available to either team. Hardliners, delighted with the outcome, promptly leaked news of the change to the press.

The Team A-Team B controversy was followed by a series of well-publicized assertions of Soviet strategic prowess. The secretary of defense, Melvin Laird, claimed that the Soviet Union was on the verge of achieving a first-strike capability. Other Defense Department officials asserted that the Minuteman missiles could be destroyed in their silos by Soviet missiles and that a dangerous 'window of vulnerability' was about to be opened.

These charges aroused concern because they were made at a time when the public's view of the Soviet Union was undergoing a significant change. In the early 1970s, strategic assessment was dominated by the defensive image of Soviet strategy. This interpretation was consistent with and supportive of arms control, expanded trade, and the political agreements the Nixon and Ford administrations had concluded with Moscow. When détente faltered, the victim of Soviet-Cuban 'adventurism' in Africa and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the Cold War

12 Freedman, U.S. Intelligence and the Soviet Strategic Threat, 197.
image of the Soviet Union regained ascendancy. Assertions that
the Soviet Union had 'matured' and was on its way towards
becoming a responsible power gave way to dire warnings that
the Kremlin was displaying a new aggressiveness. Hardliners
attributed this to Soviet recognition that the 'correlation of forces'
had changed in its favour.14

The rapid swing of opinion back towards the Cold War view
of the Soviet Union made Americans much more receptive to
the offensive interpretation of Soviet strategy. Its widespread
acceptance provided the political foundation for the Reagan
arms build-up.

EXPLAINING AWAY SOVIET DOCTRINE
The offensive school's interpretation of Soviet strategy consists
of a four-part catechism. This affirms the aggressive intentions
of the Soviet Union based on that country's strategic doctrine,
force structure, level of defence spending, and concern for civil
defence. This catechism constitutes a coherent if implausible
interpretation of Soviet strategy. True believers recite it as proof
of the Soviet Union's aggressive intentions.

The first component of the credo is the offensive nature of
Soviet strategic doctrine. As evidence, analysts cite Soviet pro-
nouncements on the feasibility of achieving victory in nuclear
war.

Most of these statements were made during the strategic

14 Eugene V. Rostow's foreword to Joseph D. Douglass Jr and Amorettta M. Hoe-
ber, Soviet Strategy for Nuclear War (Stanford CA: Hoover Institution Press 1979),
ix-x; Edward N. Luttwak, 'After Afghanistan what?' Commentary 69(April 1980),
40-9; Norman Podhoretz, 'The present danger,' Commentary 69(March 1980),
27-40; Vernon V. Aspaturian, 'Soviet global power and the correlation of
torses,' Problems of Communism 20(May-June 1980), 7-18; John J. Dziak, Soviet
Perceptions of Military Power: The Interaction of Theory and Practice (New York:
Crane, Russak 1981), 18-21; Keith B. Payne, Nuclear Deterrence in U.S.-Soviet
Relations (Boulder CO: Westview 1982), 13-18. For critiques, see Hannes Ado-
meit, Soviet Risk-Taking and Crisis Behaviour: From Confrontation to Coexistence, Adel-
phi Paper 101 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies 1973), and
Soviet Risk-Taking and Crisis Behaviour: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis
(London: Allen & Unwin 1982); Michael J. Deane, The Soviet concept of the 'corre-
debates that took place after Stalin's death and again following Nikita Khrushchev's ouster. On both occasions, long-suppressed disputes within the Soviet military about the role of strategic surprise and the effect of nuclear weapons upon the conduct of war received something of a public airing, if only for a brief time. Major-General Nikolai Talenskiy, former editor of the theoretical journal, Voennaya mysl' (Military Thought), championed the view that nuclear war would be so costly that the putative winner would emerge no better off than the loser. In 1965 he declared: 'In our days there is no more dangerous illusion than the idea that thermo-nuclear war can still serve as an instrument of politics, that it is possible to achieve political aims by using nuclear weapons and at the same time survive.'

Most military officers disagreed. Typical of their point of view was Marshal N.I. Krylov's September 1969 affirmation of the certainty of socialism's triumph in any nuclear war: 'The imperialists are trying to lull the vigilance of the world's people by ... propaganda ... to the effect that there will be no victory in a future nuclear war. These false affirmations contradict the objective laws of history ... Victory in war, if the imperialists succeed in starting it, would be on the side of world socialism and all progressive mankind.'

Until quite recently, Soviet statements about nuclear war offered contradictory and questionable guidance. Soviet military authorities overwhelmingly maintained that victory was possible. Civilians, for the most part spokesmen for various research institutes or the ministry of foreign affairs, emphasized its destructiveness. Military leaders most frequently made their pronouncements about nuclear war before military audiences or veterans' groups, to which they might be expected to stress their confidence in the inevitability of victory.}

16 N.A. Talenskiy, 'The late war: some reflections,' International Affairs, no 5 (May 1965), 15.
Soviet military prowess. Civilian spokesmen published their views in newspapers and journals which were more likely to be read by foreign audiences and which might be expected to express Soviet revulsion at the prospect of nuclear war. Pronouncements by the highest political authorities provided little clarification. In the early 1970s, Leonid Brezhnev and other Central Committee members made public statements in support of both positions. They appeared to change their line as a function of the audience they were addressing and their political intent at the time.18

The conflicting nature of Soviet pronouncements about nuclear war ought to have made Western analysts cautious about drawing inferences from them. It did nothing of the kind. Richard Pipes, Colin Gray, and other offensive school publicists cited Krylov and Soviet hardliners like him in support of their contention that Moscow believed that it could fight and win a nuclear war.19 They ignored or tried to explain away contrasting Soviet statements to the effect that nuclear war would be suicidal. Pipes, for example, asserted that 'there is ample evidence that the Soviet military say what they mean and usually mean what they say.' But, he insisted, such statements are written 'in an elaborate code language' which only an experienced analyst can decipher. 'Buried in the flood of seemingly meaningless verbiage, nuggets of precious information on Soviet perceptions and intentions can more often than not be unearthed by the

trained reader.'

Pipes offered no justification for why the passages he emphasized were the 'nuggets' and those quoted by his political opponents merely 'meaningless verbiage.'

Offensive school analysts also talk out of both sides of their mouth. They insist that the putative Soviet belief in the feasibility of nuclear war is an unambiguous indication of aggressive intentions, but they also make statements about the need to prevail in a nuclear conflagration. Colin Gray, Richard Pipes, and Daniel Graham have all insisted on the need for an American ability and will to prosecute a war to the point of Soviet political defeat. Offensive school analysts have been instrumental in moving American strategic doctrine away from MAD towards a war-fighting approach. The 'countervailing strategy,' which became the official American strategic doctrine under the Carter administration, calls for the United States to develop the means to 'prevail' against the Soviet Union at any level of nuclear conflict.

Should this official commitment to a war-winning strategy be taken as evidence of the aggressive intentions of the United States? Soviet commentators argue yes. They describe the doctrinal shift that occurred during the Carter administration as proof of a renewed American search for a first-strike capability. Together with Reagan administration pronouncements about the feasibility of fighting a nuclear war, it represents, in their view, a blatant attempt to intimidate the Soviet Union. Offensive school analysts deny this; they insist that they seek superior

20 Pipes, 'Why the Soviet Union thinks it could fight and win a nuclear war,' 27.
strategic capabilities only to deter the Soviet Union. This is, of course, the same justification offered by their Soviet counterparts. To compound the irony, Soviet authorities have been backing away from their former insistence that socialism would emerge triumphant from a nuclear war just at the time when the United States, during the Carter and Reagan administrations, has seemed to embrace the notion that victory in a nuclear war is a meaningful concept.

Soviet spokesmen became increasingly outspoken about the destructiveness of nuclear war in the late 1970s. By 1981, Brezhnev could unambiguously characterize the Soviet view of nuclear war as totally rejecting any notion of victory:

Among ourselves we say the same thing that I said for everyone to hear from the Tribunal of 26th Party Congress: that is, it is dangerous madness to try to defeat each other in an arms race, to count on victory in a nuclear war.

I will add that only he who has decided to commit suicide can start a nuclear war in the hope of emerging victorious from it. Whatever strength the attacker may have and whatever means of starting a nuclear war he may choose, he will not achieve his aims. Retaliation is unavoidable. That is our essential point of view.24

Yuri Andropov, Konstantin Chernenko, and, now, Mikhail Gorbachev, all followed the Brezhnev line.25 The minister of defence, Dimitri Ustinov, has also from time to time spoken of the futility of nuclear war. In July 1982, he declared: ‘It is

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24 Pravda, 21 October 1981.
25 On Gorbachev, see his statements in Kommunist, no 10 (1986), 113-24, Pravda, 10 July 1987, 4, and Merovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia, no 10(1986), 16-25.
senseless [to start a war] in conditions where the available armaments are more than sufficient to make biological life on earth impossible. Even the former chief of staff, Marshal Nikolai V. Ogarkov, who continued to speak of the prospects for victory in a nuclear war longer than most Soviet officials, changed his line some months before he was removed from office. In May 1984, Krasnaya Zvezda published an interview with the marshal in which he claimed that the superpowers had reached a nuclear deadlock. A first strike by either side would only provoke 'a crushing retaliatory strike against the aggressor even by the limited quantity of nuclear charges remaining to the defender – a strike inflicting unacceptable damage.'

Influential Soviet civilians have also expressed their horror of the consequences of nuclear war. Soviet scientists have joined many of their Western counterparts in warning that a nuclear war could trigger a fatal 'nuclear winter.' According to Nikita Moisieyev, deputy director of the Soviet Academy of Sciences' computer centre, a Soviet study revealed that a nuclear winter of several months' duration would follow the detonation of only 100-150 megatons of nuclear material. A first strike, using 10-15 per cent of the world's nuclear arsenal, would result in a year-long nuclear winter. 'So the weapons of one submarine,' Dr Moisieyev told Tass, 'are enough to destroy all life on this planet.'

Offensive analysts have coped with the mounting evidence that the Soviet Union fears the consequences of a nuclear war by describing it as part of a well-orchestrated 'disinformation' campaign designed to lull the West into complacency about the

26 Ustinov, 'Eliminate the threat of nuclear war.'
Soviet military build-up. They dismiss statements indicating that nuclear war would be suicidal as ‘deceptive’ or ‘purposely misleading.’ By contrast, they label as ‘candid’ the few references that can still be found asserting the military utility of nuclear weapons.

By invoking the disinformation thesis to make Soviet statements consistent with their interpretation, offensive analysts reveal their own inconsistency. As Dan and Rebecca Strode have pointed out: ‘the disinformation thesis has been propounded most avidly by the very analysts who in previous Western debates over Soviet strategy have been most insistent upon the validity of using Soviet open-source publications as guides to understanding Soviet military doctrine.’ Now they deny the relevance of these sources. The way in which these analysts have cavalierly shifted their methodological ground to suit their political convenience indicates the political nature of their enterprise.

The disinformation thesis also confronts substantive difficulties. The Soviet Union has always emphasized the importance of doctrine as a means of disseminating information about high-level policy decisions to defence officials and military officers in order to ensure their compliance with them. Pipes himself asserts that the purpose of Soviet military literature is ‘to impress upon the officers and ranks the principles of Soviet tactics and the art of operations, and ... to convey to the initiates messages of grave importance.’ If the West is being misinformed, so too is the Soviet defence establishment, which gives every indication of relying on doctrine for planning purposes.

31 Pipes, ‘Why the Soviet Union thinks it could fight and win a nuclear war,’ 27.
This seems an absurd length for Soviet leaders to go to confuse Western opinion.

The problems of the disinformation thesis are best illustrated in the case of Soviet strategy in Europe. In recent years, Soviet doctrine has emphasized a preference for a conventional offensive, and Warsaw pact forces have been equipped and trained accordingly. Soviet military writers argue that they would only employ nuclear weapons in response to Western use or preparation for use. Offensive school analysts dismiss this as disinformation and insist that the Soviet Union would use nuclear weapons at the outset of any European offensive. If so, the Soviet and other Warsaw pact officers, who take their guidance from these doctrinal pronouncements, are as much in the dark about Soviet intentions as most of their Western counterparts — unless they receive secret communications countermanding and contradicting official policy. Such a subterfuge seems far-fetched as it would tend to undermine the legitimacy of all strategic and military doctrine, even that which Soviet officials want to guide behaviour. It would also have to be carried out on a fairly large scale, which means that word of it would be almost certain to leak out. In the absence of a secret 'back channel,' one Western commentator has observed, the Soviet general staff would have to go around on the eve of an attack and pass out mimeographed doctrinal and tactical instructions about how the war is really to be fought. Only confusion could result.

This is not to imply that the Soviet Union never practises disinformation. One-sided Soviet depictions of the military bal-

ance in Europe that portray the Soviet Union as the underdog are assuredly a form of false propaganda. Other official statements also contain elements of disinformation. But this does not give analysts licence to use their own political beliefs as the criterion for distinguishing true statements from false ones and in this way to confirm tautologically their point of view.

**OFFENSIVE CAPABILITIES**

The offensive interpretation of Soviet strategy maintains that the Soviet Union is not only willing to fight a nuclear war but is well on its way to acquiring the forces necessary to win it. As far back as 1976, William Van Cleave, a prominent American hardliner, asserted that 'the Soviets ... perceive themselves as being on the verge of significant strategic superiority and of a decisive war-fighting capability in the event strategic deterrence breaks down.' Eugene Rostow, Paul Nitze, and Colin Gray have all made similar claims.

Moscow has undeniably augmented its strategic arsenal in the course of the last several decades. There are many aspects of Soviet force structure that lend themselves to menacing interpretations; the massive and well-equipped forces the Soviet Union maintains in Europe, its large-booster force of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and the highly accurate and mobile theatre nuclear systems now being dismantled as a result of the recent agreement on intermediate-range nuclear forces are all cases in point. Despite the seemingly co-operative nature of the evidence, however, offensive analysts invoke shoddy methodological sleights-of-hand to make their case for Moscow's aggressive intentions.

Most of these analysts are patently unfair in their choice and use of measures of the strategic balance. Static measures of comparison are all misleading because they say little about either side's ability to destroy a given set of targets under actual

35 Van Cleave, 'Soviet doctrine and strategy,' 52.
wartime conditions. Gross comparisons also ignore the fact that each superpower has acquired its weapons in response to its own particular strategic requirements. It would be much more meaningful to ask how effectively each side could carry out the missions it defines as essential to its security. Static indicators also say nothing about the reliability and flexibility of weapons systems, considerations which are at least as important as the weapons themselves in determining strategic potency.

Proponents of the offensive school not only ignore the methodological shortcomings inherent in all static indicators but employ those that superficially appear to make the strongest case for a Soviet advantage. For a long time, their preferred measure of the strategic balance was the explosive energy yield megatonnage of the nuclear warheads of the two sides: comparisons of megatonnage showed a steadily increasing Soviet superiority.

The Soviet lead in megatonnage reflects the fact that they build larger weapons. Until about 1980, they did this to compensate for the lesser accuracy of their ICBMs. As a weapon’s distance from the target increases arithmetically, the explosive power required to cause a given level of damage must increase exponentially. The American nuclear arsenal declined in overall megatonnage as it became more technologically sophisticated. Between 1960 and 1980, total yield declined by over 60 per cent, reflecting a shift towards more numerous and smaller warheads carried by more accurate missiles. Recently, the yield of the American arsenal has begun to increase again, in response to the perceived requirement to destroy hardened Soviet military targets. By contrast, the yield of the Soviet ICBM arsenal has declined as this force has been supplied with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs). Not surpris-

39 Brown, ‘Number mysticism, rationality and the strategic balance,’ 479-90.
ingly, yield as a measure of the strategic balance has begun to lose its appeal for hawkish analysts.

A second measure popular with offensive school analysts is equivalent megatons (EMT). One EMT represents the explosive power required to expose about 60 square miles to an over-pressure of 5 pounds per square inch (psi), a force sufficient to destroy unreinforced brick and frame buildings. The Soviet Union has led the United States in EMT since 1970; its missile force can deliver almost twice the EMT of its American counterpart.\(^{40}\)

As with yield, superiority in EMT does not necessarily confer a strategic advantage. In any war both superpowers would want to destroy a large number of particular targets. These targets are dispersed so that only a few at most could be destroyed by a single weapon. Many military targets have also been 'hardened' to make them resistant to attack. Some missile silos, for example, can withstand up to 9000 psi overpressure and can only be destroyed by a near direct hit from a nuclear weapon. For both these reasons, the United States has developed an arsenal composed of a large number of moderately powerful nuclear weapons. Apportioning its EMT among over 50 per cent more warheads enables the United States to attack more targets than the Soviet Union.\(^{41}\) Because of the greater reliability and accuracy of its missiles the United States would also be more likely to destroy a greater percentage of targets attacked. Finally, the United States is able to destroy a given target set with much less force, thereby reducing the collateral damage of any attack. In some circumstances, this could be important.

Most recently, offensive analysts have chosen to emphasize

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the importance of throw-weight as a measure of the strategic balance. Once again, this is a category in which the Soviet Union leads because of the large boosters on its SS-18 ICBM. This missile is capable of carrying a payload of 16,000 pounds into space in comparison to the 2400 pounds of the Minuteman III, still the mainstay of the American ICBM force. Such comparisons of throw-weight do not take into account the relative sophistication of the two sides' missile forces. They overlook the important fact that the United States has exploited its throw-weight potential more efficiently. American warheads have been effectively miniaturized; they are reported to carry much more yield per unit of weight than their Soviet counterparts. This miniaturization permits American ICBMs to loft into space more warheads and penetration aids in missiles of similar throw-weight. Because American land-based missiles are also more accurate, their warheads can be smaller as they require less yield to destroy a given target. For both of these reasons, raw throw-weight is a misleading measure of the strategic balance.

Even a cursory evaluation of these three strategic indicators makes it apparent that no static indicator or combination of them can hope to capture the complexity of strategic reality and reduce it to easily understood numerical coefficients. Static indicators are useful only for comparing specific attributes of the forces of the two sides, and even that is done in total abstraction from the actual strategic missions they are designed to perform. Offensive school analysts brush aside these important limitations in their effort to portray Soviet strategic capability as awesomely as possible. Their selective and inappropriate use of static measures of the strategic balance indicates the extent to which they treat facts as matters of convenience.

Nothing better illustrates the offensive school's political approach to strategy than the periodic updating of the Central Intelligence Agency's National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) of

42 Berman and Baker, Soviet Strategic Forces, 104-5.
Soviet Strategic Capabilities. This document, the successor to the Team A-Team B study, is prepared by CIA analysts using data provided by all of the relevant intelligence organizations and military services. Their representatives review drafts of the NIE and meet with their CIA counterparts to hammer out the final version to be submitted to the director of central intelligence and, ultimately, to the president.

As I know from personal experience, these inter-agency review sessions are extremely contentious. Participants from the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the services, especially the air force, invariably accuse the CIA draft of playing down the Soviet threat. They go on to make undocumented claims for the performance characteristics of various Soviet weapons or related strategic systems. Such and such a radar under construction, it is alleged, will have impressive battle management capabilities. Almost by the nature of the case, the CIA lacks hard evidence to refute this kind of claim, although its analysts might argue that previous radars of this kind lacked those capabilities and they have seen nothing thus far to indicate that this radar is in any way different from its predecessors. Because footnotes registering dissent were permissible but discouraged during the Carter administration, the need for a quasi-consensus encouraged extreme claims. Compromises about differing estimates, usually the only possible method of resolving them, had the effect of moving the NIE some distance in the direction favoured by those participants with an organizational interest in exaggerating the Soviet military threat.

During the last decade there has been a significant change in the relative power of the participants in the NIE process. Following Afghanistan and the collapse of détente, the hardliners within the Carter administration gained the upper hand. Their triumph became complete when the Reagan administration took office. Within the CIA, the relative influence of of-

43 For details about National Intelligence Estimates of Soviet Strategic Capabilities, see Freedman, U.S. Intelligence and the Soviet Strategic Threat, and Prados, The Soviet Estimate.
fensive school analysts increased and within the intelligence community as a whole, the influence of the DIA and the air force increased at the expense of the CIA. As the power balance among the players around the table shifted, so too did the tenor of the NIEs. The Soviet threat has been portrayed as steadily more formidable. In the opinion of many observers of this process, the NIEs reveal much more about the changing balance of power in Washington than they do about changing Soviet strategic capabilities.

Disputes about the contents of the NIE are not a meaningless bureaucratic game. For the services, the NIEs legitimate force modernization programmes. Defense Department spokesmen and their allies in Congress have routinely used inflated estimates to impute aggressive foreign policy goals to the Soviet Union. As former senator Frank Church warned: 'What is not generally appreciated is that these arcane documents have a power of their own to drive budgets, to create both the appetite and the justification for new weapons systems and on occasion to provide the martial drum to lead a nation.'

It is hazardous under any circumstances to infer intentions from capabilities. Capabilities are difficult to assess and estimates of them can be misleading. Throughout much of the Cold War, official American estimates of Soviet forces and their weapons have been quite inaccurate. American intelligence, at first innocently then deliberately, exaggerated the size and readiness of Soviet conventional forces in Europe. The CIA and the air force have chronically overestimated Soviet strategic forces. They were responsible for the 'bomber gap,' the 'missile

gap,' and the 'anti-ballistic missile (ABM) gap,' all of them predictions of Soviet capabilities that never materialized.47 Less frequently, the CIA has underestimated Soviet capabilities, as it did with regard to the pace of the ICBM build-up in the late 1960s and Soviet missile accuracy in the 1970s.48

Within the intelligence community it is a truism that capabilities cannot change overnight but intentions can. Capabilities are accordingly viewed as the safer indicator of the two. But in practice, American assessments of Soviet intentions have rarely changed, and then only by degree, while estimates of Soviet capabilities have changed frequently, dramatically, and, sometimes, overnight. Estimates of Soviet strategic capabilities were sharply increased in 1957 following the launching of Sputnik, then sharply downgraded in 1961-2, when satellite reconnaissance exposed the myth of the missile gap. In 1976-7, they were upgraded again as a result of the Team A-Team B controversy. Judgments of intentions are based on these seesawing estimates, not on strategic reality - whatever that is.

Capability is also a misleading yardstick of intentions because it is so often the result of considerations that have nothing to do with a state's strategic goals. Organizational traditions, technological considerations, and bureaucratic interests can be more influential.

The American experience indicates that force structure bears only the most incidental relationship to any realistic assessment


The fundamental decisions about the shape and size of the American strategic arsenal were made during the Kennedy administration. The decision to create a strategic 'triad,' each leg of which would contain sufficient forces to destroy the Soviet Union, was motivated not only by a fear of a surprise attack but also by the need to placate the clamour of the three major services for individual strategic missions. The actual number of aircraft, submarines, and missiles to be deployed was also determined by bureaucratic and political considerations. Desmond Ball has documented this nicely with regard to the ICBM leg of the triad. The 1000 Minuteman missiles that the United States secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, decided to deploy represented three times what he thought necessary for deterrence but was the minimum figure he believed Congress would accept. There is every reason to believe that the Soviet Union’s force structure is also significantly affected by organizational, bureaucratic, economic, and political considerations, although the institutional framework in which arms decisions are made is, of course, quite different.

Offensive school analysts have once again chosen to brush
aside the complexities of strategic interaction to draw disturbing, if unsupportable, inferences about the political meaning of Soviet force levels and structure. In the spring of 1969, the Nixon administration claimed that the Soviet ICBM build-up had accelerated and that the large number of MIRVED SS-95 being deployed would make the American Minuteman vulnerable to attack sometime in the mid-1970s. The secretary of defense, Melvin Laird, interpreted this build-up as unambiguous evidence of Soviet intentions. 'With the large tonnage the Soviets have,' he proclaimed, 'they are going for a first strike capability. There is no question about that.' 'If they were going for our cities and not trying to knock out our retaliatory capability,' Laird explained, 'they would not require weapons that have such a large megatonnage.' The introduction of the larger and more accurate SS-18 ICBM was taken as more compelling evidence that the Soviet Union was intent on attaining a first-strike capability. Colin Gray hammered away at this theme. He cited related Soviet strategic programmes aimed at greater missile accuracy, improved command and control, and civil defence preparations as collateral evidence in support of this interpretation.

Offensive school analysts have also drawn inferences from the pace of the Soviet strategic build-up. They have charged that it has been relentless and comparable only to Hitler's military build-up prior to World War II. To document these
claims, analysts have cited CIA reports, which up until 1983 asserted that the Soviet Union had allocated 12 to 14 per cent of its gross national product (GNP) to military expenditures throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. The CIA estimated that this represented an average annual increase in military spending of about 4 per cent a year. It also meant that the Soviet Union’s military budget was 50 per cent greater than that of the United States for all the years in question. Hawkish analysts warned that this decade-long disparity in defence spending would result in a significant Soviet military advantage sometime in the 1980s. The CIA estimates seemed bleak enough. But some strategic Cassandras claimed that they significantly underestimated Soviet military expenditures. William T. Lee, a former CIA analyst, charged in 1977 that the Soviet Union actually spent more than 20 per cent of its GNP on the military. He accused the CIA of deliberately covering up the facts. Other prominent hawks, Eugene V. Rostow, Fred Iklé, George Keegan Jr, and Daniel Graham, echoed Lee’s dissatisfaction with these estimates, although they attributed the CIA’s error to po-


Graham, the director of the DIA from 1974 to 1976, insisted that the CIA stuck to ‘unbelievably low’ estimates of Soviet military spending because higher estimates would clash with their conception of the Soviet Union as a fundamentally moderate state that sought only strategic parity with the United States.

That the Soviet military should receive such a high level of funding at a time when the Soviet economy as a whole was facing increasing difficulties made the implications of the build-up appear more ominous. Food shortages, transportation disruptions, energy constraints, and low labour productivity all contributed to a slowdown in industrial growth from an average of about 4 per cent in the 1970s to less than 2 per cent in the early 1980s. Military spending nevertheless appeared to increase; in 1981, the CIA reported a 4-per-cent growth over the previous year, while the DIA claimed an increase on the order of 6.5 per cent.

On the basis of the CIA estimates, Myron Rush, a CIA scholar in residence, speculated that Brezhnev was buying the Soviet Union a ‘window of opportunity.’ Since 1976, according to Rush, Brezhnev knew that the Soviet economy would deteriorate and make it increasingly difficult to compete in an arms race with the United States. By investing so heavily in the military in the short term, Brezhnev was purchasing a brief period of limited military superiority in which to practise a bolder policy of ‘strategic opportunism.’ ‘Having mortgaged its economy for a temporary military advantage, the USSR in the mid-1980’s

58 Some of their statements are reported in a three-part series, ‘Intelligence blunders,’ written by William F. Parham for the Norwich Bulletin, 8, 9, 10 March 1981.
will more readily be tempted to exploit strategic opportunities, employing various military means more boldly, in ways that previously might have been thought unduly provocative toward the United States.61 This was the only rational explanation Rush could find for such disproportionate allocation of scarce resources to the military. An even more extreme thesis was put forward by Edward Luttwak who argued that the Soviet Union was preparing to gamble everything on a war with China.62

Strategic forces and related systems lend themselves to a variety of missions, offensive and defensive, and it is never a simple matter to fathom the uses to which they would be put. Nothing better illustrates this truth than civil defence. Offensive school analysts cite the extensive civil defence preparations made by the Soviet Union as proof of its hostile intentions. Soviet commentators have interpreted the American lack of any civil defence effort as evidence of hostile intentions. They argue that only a country preparing to launch a devastating first strike could afford the luxury of forgoing civil defence preparations.63 Surely, these arguments reveal more about the paranoia of the two sides than they do about their intentions.

The debate over the meaning of each superpower's ICBM force also indicates the extent to which intentions exist primarily in the eyes of the beholder. Offensive school analysts assert that the only plausible explanation for the Soviet ICBM modernization programme is that it is an attempt to achieve a first-strike capability. But the same argument could have been made — and was by the Soviet Union — about the American Jupiter missiles deployed in Italy and Turkey in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These large, liquid-fuelled missiles, stationed above ground,

were useless as second-strike weapons because of their extreme vulnerability and low state of readiness. They had to be fuelled prior to launch, a process that took many hours, more than enough time for them to be attacked by Soviet bombers. The Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations nevertheless insisted that they were purely defensive weapons.64

More recently, the United States has deployed more powerful warheads on its ICBMs and increasingly accurate submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). These weapons are said to be capable of destroying hardened Soviet missile silos, something that the last two secretaries of defense have insisted is necessary for deterrence. Soviet commentators dismiss these claims as a subterfuge designed to mobilize public support for what are really first-strike weapons. In support of their contention they cite not only the characteristics of the weapons but earlier statements by air force generals to the effect that the Strategic Air Command has always envisaged using nuclear weapons in a pre-emptive disarming strike.65

The Soviet Union also insists that the United States has maintained strategic forces far in excess of its legitimate defensive needs. In the 1960s and 1970s, when MAD was the official doctrine, the United States arsenal rose from 20,000 nuclear weapons in 1965 to a peak of 32,000 weapons in 1968. This was many times the size that Robert McNamara had calculated was necessary to destroy the Soviet Union after absorbing a Soviet first strike.66 We now know that there was little relationship between declaratory and actual policy; the testimony and writings of prominent defence officials from the Kennedy

through Carter administrations have revealed the extent to which all these administrations were striving to achieve a counterforce capability while they remained publicly committed to a countervalue strategy. Not surprisingly, Soviet commentators cite this duplicity as further evidence of the Janus-faced nature of American strategy.

If American intentions were inferred only from American force structure and strategy, at least a strong a case could be made that they were aggressive. This imputation would ignore all of the bureaucratic, organizational, and political determinants of American defence policy. American military capabilities are the result of a complex bargaining process among the services, between the services and the administration, and between the administration and Congress. Threat assessments and strategies are primarily rationalizations put forward by the participants to justify or deny the need for weapons they support or oppose. This process makes a mockery of any attempt to infer political intent from the numbers and characteristics of American weapons systems.

There is good reason to suppose that Soviet defence policy is also significantly affected by bureaucratic, organizational, and political considerations. Obviously, the context in which Soviet defence decisions are made is different, but many of the same forces still come into play. The political leadership, the ministry of defence, the general staff, the five military services, and the weapons design bureaux are the principal participants in Soviet weapons decisions. Each of these bodies has interests of its own as well as ingrained institutional preferences and traditions. These differences lead to conflict and the politicization of decisions on weapons.

67 Benjamin S. Lambeth, Selective Nuclear Options in American and Soviet Strategic Policy (Santa Monica CA: Rand 1976); Desmond Ball, 'U.S. strategic forces: how would they be used.' International Security 7(winter 1982-3), 31-60; Powers, 'Choosing a strategy for World War III.'

68 Trofimenko, 'The theology of strategy.'

69 Armacost, The Politics of Weapons Innovation; Beard, Developing the ICBM; Greenwood, Making the MIRV; Ball, Politics and Force Levels; Betts, ed, Cruise Missiles; Evangelista, Innovation and the Arms Race.
Soviet disputes about force structure are more muted than their American counterparts because of the structural differences between the two systems. The most important of these are the need to initiate policy departures at the apex of the political system, the more controlled environment in which bureaucratic conflict and special interest pressures operate, and the need for partisans of a particular weapon to work within the bureaucracy to gain backing for it. No opportunity exists for those defeated in this manner to follow the American practice of taking the conflict into a wider arena in the hope that public opinion or Congress will force the executive branch to reconsider its decisions.  

Recognizing these differences, students of Soviet defence decision-making have invoked different kinds of internal causes to explain the evolution of Soviet strategic forces. In the case of the ss-9, the first heavy missile to arouse American concern for the Minuteman's survivability, they have invoked the confluence of bureaucratic tradition, institutional interests, and strategic-military needs. According to this explanation, a powerful booster tradition, a 'big missile' design team, and the perceived need to penetrate a possible American ABM defence combined to produce the ss-9 and, later, the ss-18. The ss-18 had the theoretical potential, once its accuracy was improved, to attack American missile silos, but this may not have been the impetus for its development.

The 'big missile' tradition, originally a response to the Soviet need to offset inaccuracy by size, became very threatening in American eyes after missile accuracy improved. Offensive school analysts interpret its endurance as proof of Soviet striving for a first-strike capability. Analysts more sensitive to the internal determinants of policy explain this in terms of organizational inertia and the influence of powerful bureaucracies with a vested

70 Gallagher and Spielmann, Soviet Decision-Making for Defense, 77-8; Evangelista, Innovation and the Arms Race.
interest in big boosters. These same interests may also have retarded doctrinal evolution. Dennis Ross writes:

doctrinal or subjective factors, by indirectly consecrating certain bureaucratic traditions or institutional interests may make them especially hard to challenge. For example, challenging a big missile tradition, which serves the interests and prerogatives of designers, producers, and elements of the Strategic Rocket Forces, is made far more difficult by the existence of a strategic doctrine which emphasizes the importance of denial capabilities.79

Most American defence analysts explain the size and characteristics of American strategic forces in terms of the internal dynamics of the arms procurement process. But when this method of analysis is applied to the Soviet Union, it can also explain away the most threatening attributes of Soviet force structure. To the extent that American analysts use these kinds of arguments to describe the evolution of their own force structure they must in all fairness consider their applicability to the Soviet Union. But many are reluctant to do this because it would undercut their depiction of Soviet forces as confirmation of that country's aggressive intentions.

There remains the question of Soviet defence spending, until recently the evil school's 'ace in the hole.' The most extreme claims, those of William T. Lee, have been thoroughly discredited.73 More importantly, official estimates of Soviet defence spending have been significantly reduced in the course of the last several years. In February 1983, CIA analysts were reported to have discovered that the rate of defence growth may have been substantially below the 5 per cent they had earlier claimed. An agency economist interviewed at the time

72 Ross, 'Rethinking Soviet strategic policy,' 3-30.
confessed that "the implications of this re-estimate are so political that it's dangerous to even talk about."74 One month later, the CIA bit the bullet and officially revised its judgment; it announced that the annual growth rate of Soviet defence spending from 1976 to 1981 had only been 3 per cent.75 By August, the CIA reported that the rate of growth in the early 1980s had fallen to a modest 2 per cent.76

CIA analysts attributed the decline in Soviet defence spending to a slowdown in the procurement of military hardware which had previously accounted for so much of the increase in defence spending. They speculated that the slowdown was a reaction to the overall stagnation of the Soviet economy.77 The DIA, which has for years claimed that the CIA figures were too low, also lowered its estimate of Soviet defence spending.78 These downward revisions pull the rug out from underneath claims by the offensive school that the Soviet Union is spending itself into bankruptcy to buy a window of military opportunity. They put the onus on American hawks to justify why they are still seeking increases in American defence spending.

EXPLAINING AWAY THE COSTS OF WAR

The offensive interpretation stresses Moscow's belief in the possibility of achieving victory in a nuclear war. Many of its adherents claimed that during the Carter years the Soviet Union came close to achieving the advantage it would need to win a nuclear war. Common sense rebels at the notion that a quasi-rational Soviet leader could cold-bloodedly plan and start an intercontinental nuclear war. Such a conflict would be so destructive of life and property as to negate any goal for which

it could be fought.⁷⁹ Offensive analysts disagree. They insist that Soviet leaders would not hesitate to sacrifice millions of Soviet lives if they thought it would bring about the triumph of Soviet-style communism.⁸⁰ The Kremlin's concern, they claim, extends only to the military and civilian cadres whose survival would be essential to the postwar recovery and expansion of Soviet power. They further allege that most of these people would be protected by extensive Soviet civil defence preparations.

Retired Admiral Elmo Zumwalt insists that the United States would suffer at least 100 million casualties in a nuclear war but that the Soviet civil defence programme is so effective that Soviet losses could be limited to a mere 10 million.⁸¹ Leon Gouré and Gordon McCormick allege that the Soviet civil defence effort, consisting of shelter construction for key industrial and political cadres, hardening of industrial sites, and stockpiling of food, medical supplies, and other post-attack necessities, together with the training of emergency personnel and of the general population for urban evacuation, has become 'without a doubt, one of the decisive strategic factors ensuring the ability of the state to function.'⁸²

Sceptics, including the CIA, dismiss assertions like these as fantasy.⁸³ They argue that civil defence can do little to protect industry and population from nuclear weapons. The size and

⁷⁹ Erickson, 'The Soviet view of deterrence,' 242-51.
⁸⁰ For a rebuttal, see Lebow, 'Windows of opportunity: do states jump through them?' 147-86.
⁸³ United States, 95th Cong, 1st sess, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, United States and Soviet Strategic Options, 16 and 19 January and 16 March 1977
accuracy of superpower strategic arsenals and their ability to
destroy the most hardened targets make civil defence efforts
futile. Both sides, moreover, are expected to hold ample forces
in reserve to strike at any undamaged urban area or industrial
site reoccupied after a nuclear exchange.

Offensive analysts tout the efficacy of Soviet civil defence
efforts if implemented in conjunction with a Soviet first strike
and active defence measures to reduce further the impact of
an American retaliatory strike. When all of these measures are
combined, they argue, Soviet damage limitation capability would
be sufficient to ensure a significant military-economic advantage
in the aftermath of a strategic engagement.\footnote{Gouré and
McCormick, 'Soviet strategic defense: the neglected dimension of
the U.S.-Soviet balance,' 107.} According to T.K.
Jones, a former Reagan deputy under secretary of defense, the
entire American arsenal would not be sufficient to inflict 'un-
acceptable' losses on the Soviet Union.\footnote{Testimony of T.K.
Jones, United States, 94th Cong, 2nd sess, House Committee
Government Printing Office 1976), 206-67.} Analysts who make less
far-reaching claims still assert that because of its civil defence
programme, the 'balance of terror' has been shifting to the
Soviet Union's advantage.

Offensive school analysts concede that to be effective, Soviet
civil defence efforts must be coupled with a Soviet first strike.
They also acknowledge that civil defence programmes take hours,
if not days, to implement and therefore require considerable
advance notice. Most also admit that Soviet civil defence efforts
would be ineffective against anything but a small-scale nuclear
attack. Thus Leon Gouré agrees that 'for a powerful adversary
to limit his attack in such a way would presuppose that his
strategic forces had been severely crippled either by offensive means [that is, a pre-emptive attack] or by an effective active defense, or by a combination of both.86

Gouré's 'logic' is revealing. Unwilling to admit that Soviet civil defence programmes are ineffective, he struggles to establish their effectiveness by tautological reasoning. He and other analysts who stress the value of civil defence are forced to assume that civil defence is part of a first-strike strategy. To make the leap from evidence to intentions, these analysts must once again start by assuming what they set out to prove.

The reductio ad absurdum of the offensive school's effort to justify alleged Soviet expectations of victory in nuclear war is the brain child of Paul Nitze. Leader of the opposition to SALT II and subsequently head of the arms control delegation in Geneva, Nitze has claimed that the Soviet Union might be able to fight and win a nuclear war without any loss of life to itself. In his scenario, the Kremlin exploits its impressive counterforce capability to launch a disarming strike against the Minuteman ICBMs, currently the repository of most of the United States counterforce capability. The American president, Nitze argues, would then face the choice of accepting Moscow's political demands or of retaliating against Soviet cities with his remaining nuclear weapons. Retaliation would provoke an even more devastating riposte from Moscow, which would still have many more strategic weapons in reserve. The president, Nitze believes, would have no real choice but capitulation.87

Nitze's scenario attracted considerable attention and became the principal strategic justification for the MX missile. But as the Scowcroft Commission later pointed out, it is unrealistic for many reasons.88 It is unlikely that the Soviet Union could launch

a successful disarming strike against the Minuteman and even less likely that such a strike would leave only ‘marginal’ collateral damage in its wake. Nitze actually speaks of fewer than 5 million American dead, a figure that more sober authorities have dismissed as unreasonably ‘optimistic.’ Nitze’s scenario assumes that every missile lands on or near its target, that none go astray and fall in populated areas. It also ignores deaths by secondary causes such as radiation, fire, and disease. A better estimate is probably over 20 million dead, depending on the attack scenario, season, and prevailing wind conditions.89

The assumption of marginal collateral damage is an essential condition of the Nitze scenario for unless most of the country and its people were still intact, the president would have little incentive to avoid retaliation. Even so, one can ask if any president would be able or inclined to forgo retaliation against the Soviet Union, even if only five million citizens were atomized, burned, suffocated, or otherwise killed. Nitze seems to think so and, what is more, believes that the Soviet Union could reach the same conclusion. After all, Soviet leaders would only contemplate such an attack if they were certain that the Americans would not retaliate. To do otherwise would be to risk their own destruction, given the numerous nuclear weapons that would still remain in the American arsenal.

Nitze’s certainty derives from his analysis of the balance of strategic forces that would prevail in the aftermath of a Soviet disarming strike and the influence he expects this to have on the behaviour of both sides. He assumes that Soviet and American leaders make decisions of awesome import purely on the basis of abstract conceptions of the military balance, unaffected

by their emotions or political constraints. This assumption seems unrealistically in the extreme, especially in the immediate aftermath of any nuclear attack, regardless of how 'limited' the loss of life.

For all its absurdity, the Nitze scenario reveals a lot about the nature of American strategic fears. It is another indication of the enduring hold of the trauma of Pearl Harbor on the American psyche. The Japanese attack was predicated upon the notion that the American government would behave exactly as Nitze describes: Washington was expected to acquiesce in Japanese hegemony in the western Pacific in preference to fighting a long and costly war.90 In today's strategic parlance, we would describe the Japanese attack as a limited counterforce strike meant to reduce or eliminate the United States naval capability in the Pacific. The American response was just the opposite of what the Japanese leaders had expected. The attack shocked the American people out of its isolationist mood and unleashed a furore for revenge that was not satisfied until Japan lay in ruins. Emotions ran so high that President Roosevelt and the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, General George C. Marshall, encountered domestic opposition throughout the war to their policy of directing American resources toward the European theatre.

The really significant lesson of Pearl Harbor is not American vulnerability to surprise attack but rather the American response to it: a commitment to do whatever was necessary to secure the unconditional surrender of Japan. This response demonstrates the absurdity of the notion that American decisions about war and peace are made primarily in response to calculations of cost or of relative military advantage. The Pearl

Harbor experience should give pause, not encouragement, to an adversary contemplating a counterforce attack as a means of bending or breaking American will. One hopes the Russians have learned this lesson; Paul Nitze, it is evident, has not.

CONCLUSION
The offensive interpretation of Soviet strategy lacks any conceptual rigour. It is based on one-sided use of selectively chosen evidence. Offensive school analysts cite Soviet spokesmen who assert that their country would emerge victorious from such a conflict. They dismiss, deny, discredit, or ignore far more frequent Soviet statements to the contrary. They present their claims about the size, scope, and cost of Soviet strategic programmes as if they were established fact when they usually rest on fragmentary and uncertain data. Not surprisingly, projections and estimates based on these data almost invariably turn out to be greatly exaggerated.

In his novel, The Possessed, Fyodor Dostoevsky explored the motivations that led people to join a revolutionary conspiracy that engaged in political murder. He described the members of this cabal as fools or scoundrels. The fools, by far the majority, were naïve enough to believe that assassination would help to usher in a glorious new age for mankind. The scoundrels, mostly the leaders, did not take their ideology or rhetoric seriously but used them to recruit and exploit others in pursuit of their own selfish ends.

Offensive school adherents might be similarly characterized. The fools describe the analysts and politicians who really worry about a Soviet sneak attack prompted by some marginal strategic advantage. The scoundrels are those analysts, industry spokesmen, military officers, and public officials who raise the spectre of a Soviet sneak attack as a calculated means of frightening the public into supporting the vast expenditure their pet defence projects require.

It would be foolhardy, perhaps libellous, to try to identify fools and scoundrels by name. Both types exist. It is hardly
surprising that many ordinary citizens and congressmen, nurtured for decades on an unrelieved diet of anti-Soviet rhetoric, give credence to a scenario that assumes that the Soviet Union is on the lookout for the opportunity to launch a limited counterforce attack. It is quite something else to discover that many well-informed members of the strategic community continue to speak about this possibility as if it were a real danger. They are either prisoners of emotionally based fears or out to incite feelings of strategic insecurity for ulterior political and economic motives.

Support for the latter hypothesis can be inferred from the use that has been made of Soviet strategic prowess as a political rationale for the development and deployment of the MX and other major strategic systems. More striking still is the fact that so many proponents of these weapons or related systems are employed by the Department of Defense, major defence contractors, or air-force-sponsored research institutes, or are themselves active duty or retired military officers. When their strategic arguments are evaluated against this background they give every appearance of being propaganda conducted on behalf of the air force, the navy, and their prime contractors. This also helps to explain why proponents of the offensive school thesis have held so doggedly to their point of view: to acknowledge any of the telling criticisms levelled against it would undercut the principal justifications for major weapons systems.

Propagandists of this kind can be astute manipulators of elite opinion. They are not interested in the validity of their claims, only in their budgetary outcomes. However, as Dostoevsky observed, scoundrels can only succeed because fools abound. One purpose of this and other studies must be to impart a little more sophistication about strategic analysis to the public in the hope of reducing the number of people ready to succumb to yet another offensive school scam.