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President's Notes: Challenge!

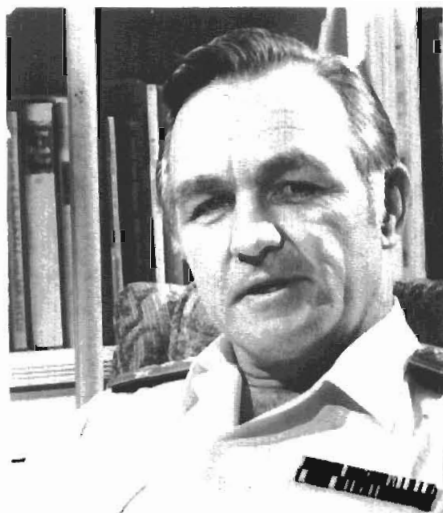
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CHALLENGE!

A key element in the mutual deterrence that has existed between the United States and the Soviet Union for the past quarter century is the subtle communication of intentions and capabilities to each other. Each of the superpowers has taken considerable pains to insure that the other is aware of the threat to its existence should war break out, and each has accepted this mutual understanding and communication as cornerstones of deterrence.

By operating within such a system, a primary consideration in any defense decision has become how the enemy will interpret a given situation or action. For the navies of the Soviet Union and the United States, this has been the case not only in terms of nuclear deterrence but in conventional strategy as well.

In his stimulating article "Naval Strategy and Naval Politics," Professor B. Thomas Trout of the University of New Hampshire has addressed this phenomenon and has concluded that much of the form and size of the developing Soviet fleet and much of the U.S. modernization program stem from perceptions of the other's missions and capabilities. The U.S. SLBM system was seen as a valid argument for a similar Soviet system. The emphasis by the U.S.S.R. on submarines has led to an expanded U.S. ASW program. Each navy has postulated the perceived mis-

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sions and capabilities of the other to define its own force requirements.

Each navy, in addition to creating and protecting a substantial nuclear retaliatory capability, has emphasized the traditional naval roles. Each uses the conventional naval war fighting and peacetime presence capabilities of the other as justification for enhancing its own potential in these areas. This adds to the complexity of communicating the proper "image" to each other. In the less specific naval roles, those directed toward political objectives and, in general, those farthest removed from quantification, there is the greatest risk for incorrect perception by the adversary.

The problem is further complicated by the tendency pointed out by Captain Robert Bathurst in our May/June Review for navies to develop largely along culturally determined lines tied to how the Nation sees itself. Often these elements of introspective national perception completely ignore the impact a certain decision may have on the decisionmakers of other nations, thus leading to the possibility of a costly and destabilizing arms race.

The profound uncertainties in assessing the threat presented by a potential opponent and the difficulties in transmitting the desired signals offer a great challenge for the U.S. Navy both today

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and in the future. We must take care that we do not become so involved in the perception/reaction game that we lose sight of the overall political and military objectives established for us by higher authority. Conversely, we must understand how our decisions are likely to be interpreted by the Kremlin, by our allies, and by others. I, for one, believe that we can effectively project a proper image of naval strength and capability without appearing to be belligerent. To do this we must tightrope our

way between compromising national security and encouraging a naval arms race. It will not be easy, but it is a practical and an intellectual challenge to which we must rise.



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