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**Secretary of  
Defense**



**Director of  
Central  
Intelligence**

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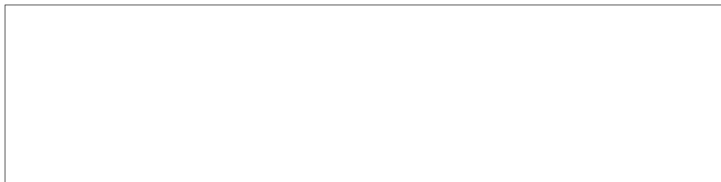
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# US and Soviet Strategic Forces

**Joint Net Assessment**

**Executive Version**

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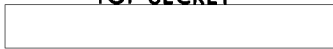
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*NI 83-10002X  
TS 833355  
14 November 1983*

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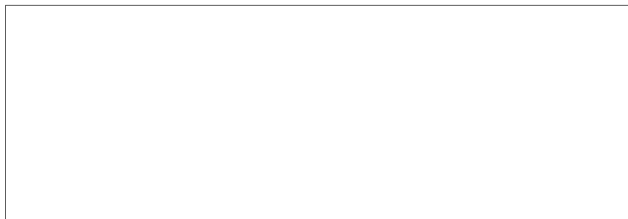


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**JOINT NET ASSESSMENT**

**US AND SOVIET  
STRATEGIC FORCES**

**EXECUTIVE VERSION**



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## PREFACE

This first joint net assessment by the Secretary of Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence analyzes factors central to understanding the significance of the Soviet and US strategic postures. Emphasis is on displaying trends and key asymmetries in US and Soviet forces, perspectives, operational concepts, and capabilities. This assessment, although incomplete, is intended to serve as a prototype for future efforts and to identify areas for additional study and intelligence collection. 

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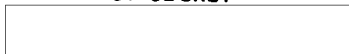
To a large extent, any net assessment is the result of review and synthesis of many diverse analyses of a broad subject area. In this assessment we discuss the serious deficiencies in our traditional analyses of the strategic balance. These analyses limit our perspective and cause distortions in our views of the strategic balance. If current work on improved methods is successful, future assessments will include more informed judgments. However, that research is not likely to bear fruit for at least several more years, and no amount of modeling and gaming can ever fully substitute for what we hope will continue to be a lack of operational experience in nuclear warfare. 

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A more detailed assessment is given in a separate supporting volume. 

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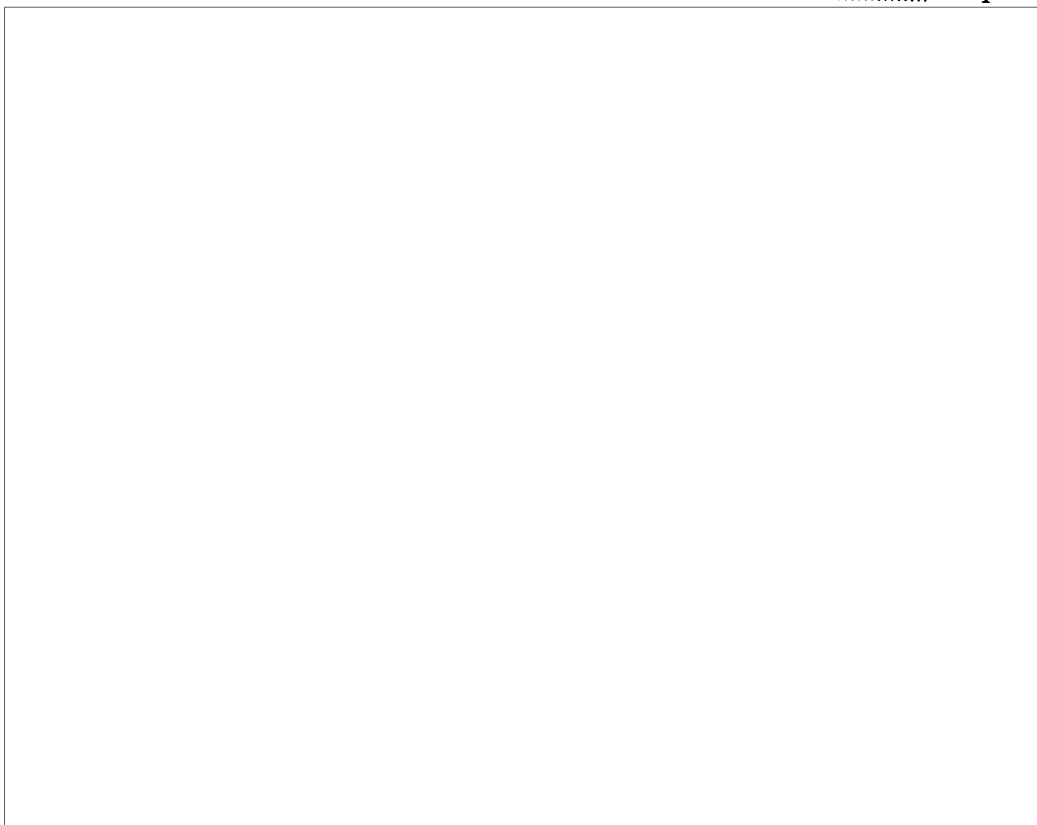


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## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
PREFACE .....	iii
KEY JUDGMENTS .....	1

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## KEY JUDGMENTS

The strategic nuclear balance is probably adequate to deter a direct nuclear attack on the United States or a major attack on Europe. The Soviets, in our view, have some clear advantages today, and these advantages are projected to continue, although differences may narrow somewhat in the next 10 years. It is likely, however, that the Soviets do not see their advantage as being as great as we would assess. Moreover, even in our assessments the Soviet advantages, while significant, do not appear to be great enough for us to be concerned that we no longer have the capability to deter large-scale nuclear war. Clearly we still do. The uncertainties in all this still would make it unattractive for the Soviets to escalate to such a level of warfare; they could not expect with high confidence to prevail. We are greatly concerned, however, about the effects of strategic nuclear imbalances on the behavior of the two sides in crises and lesser conflict situations. [redacted]

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The United States structured its major alliances during the period of US superiority in strategic nuclear forces. When our decisions were made in the early and mid-1960s to settle for parity, the concept of parity was seen by some as a good thing of itself. The full consequences of strategic parity for the overall military balance with the Soviets, for our position throughout the world, and for the cohesion of US alliances over the longer run have not yet been fully realized. [redacted]

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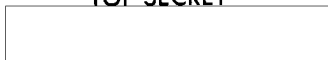
One consequence is that the range of Soviet actions we can deter has undoubtedly narrowed. The shift in the strategic balance over the last 15 to 20 years has made the Soviets more willing to try to coerce the Europeans and to try to split them from the United States. This policy is paying off; there has been an edging of many Europeans toward a position of neutrality, coincident with the buildup of Soviet strategic forces and of other Soviet forces focused directly against Europe. The Soviets have also been willing to exploit soft spots in the Third World more aggressively. [redacted]

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There is a heightened possibility that the Soviets might challenge some US interventions in crises, particularly those involving actions against a friendly or client state in the Third World. A major crisis, analogous to the Cuban missile crisis, in which we are forced to back down much as the Soviets did in 1962, would produce a massive shift in the perceptions of US strength relative to that of the Soviet Union in the eyes of the US public and of other nations. [redacted]


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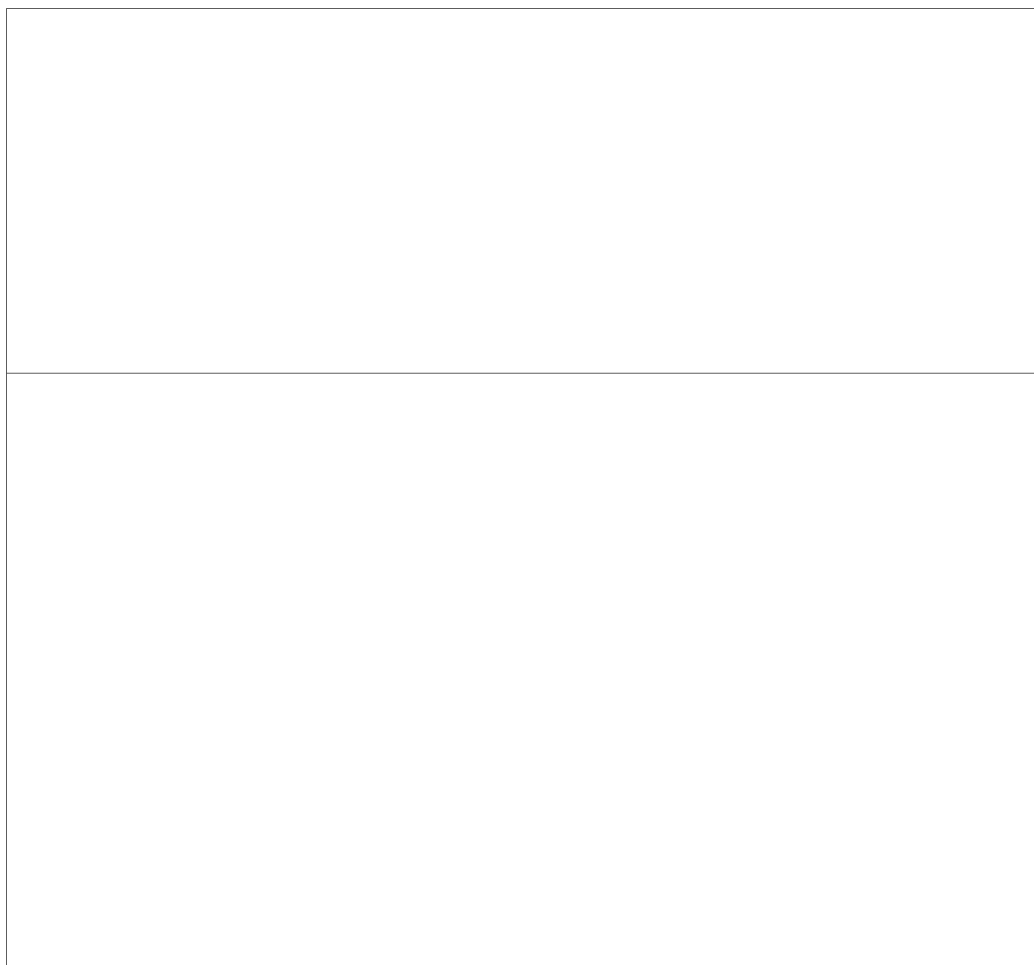
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If deterrence fails to one degree or another, the adequacy of the strategic balance would vary during the possible phases that might precede, constitute, and follow initial large-scale nuclear strikes:

- During a crisis, and in conflict prior to large-scale nuclear strikes, the US relative strategic position would probably improve over the peacetime situation with the generation of the full US bomber and ballistic missile submarine forces, and the deployment of our attack submarines, which are capable of attriting a large part of the Soviet SSBN force. 

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Although we believe the Soviets are closer to achieving their goals than we are to achieving ours, the Soviets would evaluate their own prospects more pessimistically, and would lack confidence in being able to succeed. They are highly concerned about:

- The capabilities of US antisubmarine warfare (ASW) against their submarines.



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- The effects of new US programs on overall US capabilities.
- Their ability to degrade US command, control, and communications sufficiently to prevent a large-scale, well-coordinated retaliation.
- Their own ability to maintain continuity of command and control throughout key phases of a conflict. [ ]

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### How Much Do US Programs Help?

Renewed US efforts over the past several years will slow the erosion in the relative US position. However, it will take a long time, and a persistent effort, to redress our deficiencies. Although US investment will be substantial over the next decade, Soviet investment will also be considerable, will be more comprehensive, and will build on 20 years of previous investment. Our changes in policy and planning are as important as the increased investments. [ ]

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The Soviets already show signs of being worried about our turnaround, which signals greater American seriousness about competing in the strategic force arena than has been evident for many years. The Soviets must fear that we will follow with the introduction of new technologies that would render the entire Soviet strategic posture much less effective. The President's speech of 23 March 1983 proposing US defenses against ballistic missiles has probably increased Soviet concerns. [ ]

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From the Soviet perspective, the best way to avert these dangers is to try to prevent the United States from carrying through with our programs, using domestic opposition in the United States and Western Europe, diplomacy, and the arms control process. Eroding the credibility of US nuclear strength by any and all means, including arms control agreements and the negotiating process, is a central Soviet strategic aim; they made great progress in the 1970s. The Soviets have pursued a dual-track approach to arms control: seeking agreements which halt or slow US strategic force deployments, while continuing an across-the-board buildup and modernization of forces not limited by agreements. [ ]

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### Strategies for Competing More Effectively With the Soviets


The military programs the United States is now pursuing have a more competitive character than any since the mid-1960s. A more effective competitive strategy might include the following elements:

***Complicating Soviet Military Problems:*** Evolving strategic offensive and defensive postures, which are so diversified as to pose


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difficult problems of attack to the Soviets—postures strengthened by more emphasis on survival, wartime endurance, and robust C<sup>3</sup>I. 


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**Leveraging Our Lead in Technology:** Selectively exploiting our lead in technology to introduce qualitatively superior new US weapons systems, which could render obsolete large portions of the capital stock of weapons in the Soviet arsenal and cause them to react in ways costly to them but not to us (for example, air defense). We could also strengthen deterrence by playing on Soviet fears about our technical prowess. It may be better to allow the technological competition in defensive systems to proceed, rather than try to stop it, in the dubious belief (not shared by the Soviets and rejected by the President in his strategic defense initiative) that active defenses are bad per se. 

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**Altering the Thrust of US Arms Control Initiatives:** Much more limited agreements, more readily verified, may be more feasible than the comprehensive kind that we have been seeking (for example, more like the atmospheric nuclear test ban rather than SALT or START). In this case, arms control could partially constrain the Soviet Union, but there would be no illusion that an agreement is a panacea for the strategic competition—the illusion that attended SALT I and SALT II. To be successful we would have to change the public perception of arms control as the solution to our strategic force problems, to one of arms control as an adjunct to our strategy for competing with the Soviets. 

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**Reassessing the Role of Allies:** The largest unsolved problem created by the growth of Soviet nuclear power is a new strategy for the defense of Europe. We have sought a cheap defense based on the threat of nuclear escalation, but the growth in Soviet strength has eroded the basis for such a strategy. There are several alternatives for improving the defense of Europe, including a change in the willingness of the Europeans to invest in their own security, a greater role for the British and French nuclear forces in the defense of Europe, and a conscious exploitation of instabilities in Eastern Europe. 

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